MOTHER MACHREE

MARTIN J. SCOTT, S.J.

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MOTHER MACHREE

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MOTHER MACHREE

A NOVEL

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BY

MARTIN J. SCOTT, S.J.

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To

JOHN MCCORMACK

Lark of Song

Who has made "Mother Machree" a household word throughout the world, this volume is affectionately dedicated

3555

THE LARK

He rose and singing passed from sight:—
A shadow kindling with the sun,
His joy ecstatic flamed, till light
And heavenly song were one.

FATHER TABB.

FOREWORD

This is in the main a true narrative. There are some variations of names and events because most of those concerned are living. The author could wish for a different turn of events, but he believes that his readers will be more interested in perusing a true narrative than one merely designed for entertainment.

MOTHER MACHREE

I

ATHER, please may I join the choir?"

"Not now, sonny, it's full."

Father Boone was on his way over Eighty-fourth Street when he was thus addressed by a lad of about nine.

Two weeks later on Park Avenue, the same boy:

"Father, may I join the choir, please?"

"No room now, sonny, wait until next year."

About a month afterwards on Eighty-sixth Street, again the same lad:

"Father, please let me be a choir boy!"

"Sonny, I have already said: 'Next year.'"

"But, Father, won't you try my voice?

My mother was the best singer in all Ireland, and she said my voice was better than hers."

"Next September, my boy, I take on new boys; see me then."

"But, Father—"and the lad could not say more for the tears that filled his eyes and the clutch in his throat.

Father Boone stopped and took the lad by the hand:

"How old are you, sonny?"

"Nearly nine, Father."

"When will you be nine?"

"In about three months, Father."

"Well, on your ninth birthday, come and see me."

Father Boone was in charge of the boy choir of St. Leonard's Church. Once a year he tested some three or four hundred voices among the parochial school boys, and considered himself fortunate if he got fifteen good voices from the lot. These lads he formed into a special class for voice culture, and ordinarily did not

take on any new boys during the year, as it would interfere with the work.

About three weeks after the last conversation, Father Boone was hurrying over Eighty-seventh Street on a sick call. Walking fast and swinging his arms, he suddenly felt a hand on his. Before he could look to see who was taking this liberty, he heard the same small voice:

"Father, must I wait so long before you try my voice?"

As he spoke the lad held his hand around one of the priest's fingers and, half walking, half running, looked up with searching eyes into Father Boone's face. The priest kept right on, swinging his arms as he hastened along, his finger clutched by his ardent petitioner. He did not reply.

"Father, won't you give me a chance? My mother was the best—"

"Now, see here, son, if you don't let go that finger and skip, your mother will have one boy less to worry her. Skiddoo!"

But he didn't skip. He clung. The

priest's words were harsh, but not his manner. Boys have an instinct for discerning friend from foe.

"Father, I sang in a saloon last night, and some of the men cried. They took up a collection and gave me five dollars and sixty cents. I gave the money to my sister, and she threw it out the window. She said she didn't want saloon money! But I saw where she threw it, and I picked it all up except sixty cents. See?" He held the money in his free hand for the priest's inspection. "Won't you try me, Father, before the three months are up?"

Father Boone walked along fast.

"Why didn't you give the money to your mother?"

"She's—, she's— d—dead, Father," his eyes filling.

"Oh, come now, little man, don't take on that way, it will hurt your voice. When did your mother die?"

"When I was six, Father."

"And what's your name, laddie?"

"Barney."

"Barney?"

"Yes, Father. Of course that's not my real name, my real name's Bernard. Mother always called me Bernard. But the boys all call me Barney, and I've got so used to it that I call myself Barney. But Alice always calls me Bernard."

"And who is Alice, Bernard?"

"Why, Alice is my sister. It was she who threw the money out the window."

"What were you doing in the saloon, Bernard?"

"It was like this, Father. I was walking along whistling a little and humming a little and singing a little, and as I passed the saloon some men were standing around. I didn't notice them, but kept right on singing. It was 'Mother Machree,' and I was singing it like John McCormack on the Victrola, and all at once I thought of Mother, and somehow I thought she heard me, and as I said the

last words I just stopped and held them long and my voice trembled, and the notes seemed to hang in the air.

"When I ended I looked around and saw the men staring at me and whispering, and one man was wiping his eyes and another was looking away, and one man said: 'Come here, boy, what's your name?' I said: 'Barney.' Says he: 'Barney what?' I said: 'Barney Kenney.' He put his hand in his pocket and gave me a quarter. I said: 'What for?' He said: 'Candy.' I said: 'No, it goes to Sis.' He said: 'Who's Sis?' I said: 'My sister is Sis, that's what I call her.'

"Then the man that wiped his eyes with his handkerchief said: 'Come here, boy,' and he took me by the hand and said: 'Is your mother dead?' I said: 'Yes.' He said: 'I thought so.' I said: 'Why did you think so?' But he didn't say, but turned away, and I could see he had tears in his eyes. Then they said: 'Will you sing that song again for us?' 'Sure,' I

said, 'I love to sing it.' They brought me inside and all sat round and I sang it. Near the end I almost broke down because some of the men were wiping their eyes. Then they passed the hat and gave me the five sixty."

"I must go in here now, Bernard, to attend to a person who is very ill. You drop around and see me at the Rectory some time to-day."

The priest went in to perform his sacred ministrations. After about twenty minutes, he came out and started briskly for home. He had not gone more than a few paces when he felt his finger again clutched by a tiny hand, and a small voice reached his ears:

"Father, if I go over now will you try my voice?"

"You'll be the death of me if I don't, so come along."

"Say, Father, why did the men's eyes fill when I sang?"

"Is your father living, Bernard?"

"No, he died when I was a baby. I never saw him. Why did the men cry when I sang, Father?"

"Who else is in the family besides you and Sis?"

"Only us, just us two."

"How old is Sis?"

"Nineteen last August. Why did the men cry when I sang, Father?"

"Does Sis work?"

"Of course, that's how we live. There's only us two. If she didn't work, I I wouldn't be here now."

"Where would you be?"

"In the orphan asylum, of course. Say, Father, why did the men cry when I sang 'Mother Machree?'"

"What does Sis work at?"

"She's a telephone girl. She makes fifteen forty a week, but she don't get all that from the telephone. She works nights making little paintings on cards for a firm down town. She gets three dollars a dozen and makes a dozen every

week. But, say, Father, why did the men cry when I sang?"

"Here we are now, Bernard, come into the Rectory. Wait for me a few minutes, and I'll take you over to the music room and try your voice."

Ten minutes later the priest and the boy were in the rehearsal room of the boy choir.

"Now stand up like a little man, and let me hear you sing 'Mother Machree.'"

Perfectly at ease, without the slightest self-consciousness, he took his position a few paces from the priest. He was small, even for nine. His face had a very spiritual look. Large, deep eyes seemed to penetrate a world beyond. Simplicity, trustfulness, tenderness, stood out in every feature. The priest sat back in expectation. Bernard began.

"There's a spot in me heart which no colleen may own,
There's a depth in me soul never sounded or known,

There's a place in my mem'ry, my life, that you fill,
No other can take it, no one ever will."

Father Boone looked up. Bernard's face was aglow, the boy seemed transformed, his eyes were uplifted as if gazing upon those of his mother. Clear, rich, round, tender notes flowed from his oval mouth; every syllable was clear and distinct and instinct with feeling. It was artless art.

Father Boone had never heard such a voice. It transported him. He was in another world. Those tones had rent the veil which obscures the spiritual realm, and he felt now as one in the presence of an angel. At the words: "There's a depth in me soul never sounded or known," the little voice quivered and floated in the air like a strain from Paradise. But this was only the prelude.

"Sure I love the dear silver that shines in your hair,

And the brow that's all furrowed and
wrinkled with care;
I kiss the dear fingers so toil-worn for
me,
Oh, God bless you and keep you!
Mother Machree!"

He stopped. And yet he did not stop —the final notes went floating on and on, and his gaze followed them. He peered as it were into eternity, he seemed to see what mortals seldom behold, he looked ecstatic; his soul, so innocent, so exquisite, took flight beyond the realms of sense. He was carried away by the melody of his own making. For a moment he stood motionless, out of himself. Slowly coming to, he looked towards Father Boone. It was the first look since beginning his song.

"Why, Father, you're crying!"

For answer, the priest laid his hand on the boy's head, and whispered: "God bless you, Barney Boy!"

II

H, Sis, guess, what?"

"Well?"

"I'm in the choir. I sang for Father Boone, and—"

"Didn't I tell you not to pester him any more? You've annoyed him so much that I'm ashamed of you, you have—"

"But, Sis—"

"No 'but' about it, Bernard, I distinctly gave you to understand—now stop your tears. Why, what's the matter, Bernard? Come now, it's all right, give Sis a kiss, that's the good boy. Now another. Why, you little rogue, you're laughing! Tell me about it, Bernard."

"Well, it was like this, Sis. I saw Father Boone, and I just couldn't help running up to him. Some people are afraid of him—I'm not. He looks stern,

but I know he's not. Well, as I got alongside, his arm was a-swinging and a-swinging, and I reached out and grabbed his finger and—"

"Oh, Bernard, such boldness, and from you!"

"He didn't mind. I can tell. You see, if he did, he'd have jerked it away, but he didn't. And I said to him: 'Father, won't you try my voice before the three months are up?' Well, he did get a little mad at that. He said: 'Skiddoo!'"

"Bernard!"

"But he said it in a way that I knew he didn't mean it. You see, he didn't pull his finger away. So I kept on, and I told him about the five sixty."

"How did you dare?"

"Well, you wouldn't tell me why the men cried when I sang 'Mother Machree,' and I wanted to know, and there was no one else I could ask."

"What did he say?"

"Just what you did—nothing. He just

kept on asking questions about Mother and Father and you."

"Why, he doesn't know me, Bernard."

"He didn't, but he does now."

"Well?"

"I told him you were a telephone girl, and that you earned all the money in the house, and that you painted things to help earn our living, and that there was just us two. But I didn't tell him how naughty you were to me!"

"You'd better run, you little rascal. If I get my hands on you—"

"More kissing, I suppose!"

"Well, give Sis a kiss, and go on. Another. Now, what happened next?"

"Oh, we were at the Rectory by that time, and he said to come in, and he would try my voice."

Alice now was all attention. She had her own estimate of Bernard and his voice, but she was almost afraid to trust herself. She loved her brother so much that she feared that the qualities and tal-

ents that she perceived were perhaps imaginary.

His talk and his ways were different from those of other boys. At times he frightened her by his questions. The other world seemed as real to him as this. He was always speaking of "that place where Mother is." For hours he would sit and sing to his mother as if she were before him. Sometimes, unobserved, she heard him say such things as: "Shall I sing that again for you, Mother?" or "Wasn't that nice, Mother?" or "Are the angels any nicer than Sis, Mother?" She would then make a noise and come in scolding, only to have him make a leap for her and smother her with kisses.

At other times, she would sit and watch his face as he read some book or other. He always had a far-away look, as if communing with another world. His greatest pleasure was to be with her. Always on returning from work, she found him waiting for her. Frequently he was

at the car-stop to greet her as soon as she alighted. This was sure to be the case if the weather was bad, or if he had a bit of unusually good news. It was great fun for him to tease her. "Guess who called to-day, Sis?" She, excitedly: "Who?" "The milkman." "Oh, you—" with the sweetest smile, the herald of a kiss when they reached home.

But to-day's was real news. To get into Father Boone's choir was the ambition of every boy in the parish. It had been Bernard's dream since before his mother's death. After her death, it was almost an obsession with him. The boy choir of St. Leonard's Church was among the very best in the city. One of the leading papers ranked it first. People came from all over to hear these wonderful boy choristers.

And now Alice hears that Father Boone has accepted Bernard! She was so much agitated over the news that to keep from betraying her emotion she had scolded

him for boldness on his telling of it. But he knew what she felt. They were too much alike to feel differently on this event. So now she was all on edge as she awaited the result and details of his singing for Father Boone.

"We went over to the choir room across the court—"

"Weren't you afraid, Bernard, I mean, weren't you, you know, weren't you at all, just a little bit frightened or shaky?"

"No, Sis, I just kept saying: 'Now's my chance.'"

"Did you talk at all on the way over?"

"Not a word, Sis, and I'm glad we didn't, because somehow I didn't want to."

"And Father Boone?"

"When we got to the room, he took me by the hand and gave me a pat on the cheek, and said: 'Now, young man, let's see what you can do.' Then I quickly said a 'Hail Mary,' and as I was finishing it, I seemed to see Mother looking right at

me. All during the song I could see her face just as it was the day I made my first Communion, and she said I was her little angel. That was the day, you know, Sis, that she consecrated me to the Blessed Virgin, and I never saw her look so before or after, except when she was dying and received holy Viaticum. Well, her face seemed just like that, as I finished the 'Hail Mary.'

"It seemed, Sis, as if I were in church. The pictures on the wall were holy ones, the cassocks and surplices of the choir boys were on the racks, and Father Boone sat there just as solemn as if he were at the altar. Well, anyway, Sis, I seemed in church or in heaven or somewhere else, for I didn't feel as if I were in a room singing for anyone, even Father Boone. I blessed myself, I don't know why. I suppose it's because I felt I was in church, and I began to sing.

"Sis, honest, I don't remember one thing from then on. I saw Mother, Sis,

not with my eyes, but just as real as you are there now, and, Sis, I saw her sweet face, and I felt a great yearning for her, and I wanted to be with her, and she looked deep into my soul and seemed to know my thoughts. All of a sudden, the song was over, and I seemed to hear an echo dying away, 'Mother Machree!" For about a minute, Sis, I didn't know where I was. Then I looked around and there was Father Boone, and tears were on his face, and he did not seem to see me for a while, and then he stood up, and said: 'God bless you, Barney Boy.' Why, what's the matter, Sis? I thought you'd be glad to hear this. Why are your eyes wet?"

"Bernard, let us kneel down and say a little prayer together."

With her arm enfolding him and her head resting on his, they knelt down before a little shrine of the Immaculate Mother. Tenderly and earnestly, in the silence of her heart, she invoked the

Blessed Mother to have in her keeping her angel brother.

When they arose, Alice, taking his head in her hands, bent down and kissed him tenderly on the forehead, as if he were something sacred. And he, looking up at her, breathed:

"Sis, you look just like Mother now!"

III

IN order to understand the subsequent career of Bernard, a few words must be said about the details of the choir. The boy choir of St. Leonard's was a smooth-working organization. It consisted of the choir proper, that is, those who sang in the church, and two preparatory groups, known as the Junior Choir and the Novice Choir. It usually took two years to prepare a boy for the main choir.

The first year, he joined the novice choir. Here he was taught the proper way of using his voice. For a year he was under a master of vocalization, who did nothing but exercise him in voice production. Several times each week, the boys of the novice choir spent an hour after school singing scales which were adapted to pro-

duce a round, flexible tone. This was dry, hard work. It meant a good deal to a boy of nine to give his precious afternoon three times a week to the severe drilling of the vocalization class.

Yet so highly was membership regarded that it was never known that a boy dropped out of his own accord. The discipline was very strict. Regularity and punctuality were absolutely insisted on. No boy thought of being absent or late without excuse. It often happened that for a period of several months, there was not one absentee or late-comer. Boys are shrewd bargainers, and it must have been worth while to have been so faithful. And it was.

And that was Father Boone's success with boys. He made it worth while for them. He knew boys. We shall see later on how he made it worth while.

Mr. Harrington was the master of vocalization. Father Boone did not know much about the technical part of singing,

but one thing he did know, and that was how to get results. He was careful to select the right man to do a thing, and then let him entirely alone, except to observe. If his man understood his work and attended to it faithfully, Father Boone never let his presence or supervision be felt. But in a thousand ways, which no one perceived, he kept things moving smoothly. He used to say that his main job was to keep the machine well oiled. He saw to it that the boys were interested in their work, and that their instructors had every facility for doing their work satisfactorily.

Mr. Harrington was a most conscientious and capable master of vocalization. Under his instruction, the lads readily learned how to give out that beautiful, clear tone which constitutes the charm of a boy voice. He began by teaching the boys how to employ throat and mouth in the delicate art of tone production. To the average boy, nothing is more disagree-

able than this interference with his natural way of doing things. A boy wants to sing as he likes. He prefers his own way, even if it be bad, to another's, no matter how good. He wants to shout. Noise is his specialty. And he wants to sing only for fun. To be obliged to sit for an hour and clearly articulate every syllable, and to open lips and mouth wide and round, and to sing the vowels in every conceivable formation, is work, hard work, for Jack.

Yet the novice choir liked the work, and this for several reasons. First, because it was the necessary step to the junior choir, and eventually to The Choir. Secondly, because Mr. Harrington made it very enjoyable for them. He knew how to teach boys. He held their interest throughout, and knew when to relax and when to resume. Moreover, he had the indefinable knack of getting boys to work without their realizing it. He was master of vocalization not only for the novice

and junior choirs, but for the big choir, as all the boys called the church choir.

After a year under Mr. Harrington, practicing nothing but tone scales, the boys passed to the junior choir. Here they were under two masters, Mr. Harrington, who taught them advanced vocalization and music reading, and Mr. Klein, the choir master, who directed them as they rendered easy selections from the Mass and Vesper service. As a boy approached the end of his year in the junior, he was able to read music with facility and to sing artistically. The junior was the reserve choir. When a vacancy occurred in the big choir, there was always ready a boy from junior who could take the place. It was usually the most perfect voice that was chosen to fill a vacancy in the senior choir, but almost every boy was qualified to move up.

Every Sunday before high Mass, the boys of the big choir assembled in the music room, and under Mr. Harrington's

direction, scaled for twenty minutes. This was to tone up the voice and have it in condition for the church service. That was why the singing was always good from the very beginning of service at St. Leonard's. Some choirs take time to get warmed up. St. Leonard's was warmed up before a note was sung.

There were eight men in the choir, tenors and bases, four of each. The boys numbered forty, twenty-five sopranos and fifteen altos. On Wednesday afternoon, the organist and Mr. Harrington would go over the Sunday program with the senior choir. On Friday evening, the full choir, men, boys, director, organist, rehearsed the Sunday service.

Mr. Harrington on this occasion took his place with the men. He was the baritone soloist. The organist, Mr. Shore, presided at his instrument, and Mr. Klein, the choir master, directed. Father Boone sat in the rear, apparently doing nothing, but it was noticed that things

never went quite so well when he was not around. The choir master painstakingly went over the whole program for the next Sunday. In order to obtain the right effect he would sometimes delay on a passage for a half hour. He never considered it loss of time, for if the choir learned how to render one part well, he knew that it was so much acquired for every similar part.

The boys, therefore, were under three masters, Mr. Klein, Mr. Shore and Mr. Harrington. Masters and men and boys were all under the supervision of Father Boone, although, except on rare occasions, they hardly realized it. One thing they did realize—that everything was ready and in order at all times. And they knew that that did not happen of itself.

A boy was, therefore, two years preparing for the big choir, and was usually twelve years old on making it. As a boy's voice breaks ordinarily at fifteen or sixteen, his service as a choir boy was generally limited to three or four years. Just

when a boy was most serviceable, when he could read almost anything at sight, and his voice was full and strong, his career would suddenly terminate. The voice would break, never to come back as a boy voice. The rose is never so beautiful as just before it begins to fade.

IV

ALTHOUGH the choir training was in the hands of the three masters, the boys themselves were under the direct supervision of Father Boone. It was he who selected every voice in the choir. In selecting the boys, he had three requirements which he called head, heart, and voice. By this he meant that, to be a choir boy, a lad must show intelligence, artistic temperament, and a fairly good voice. Intelligence came first. No matter how good a voice a boy had, he could not enter the choir unless he stood well in his class at school. Father Boone found from experience that a backward boy was useless in the choir, no matter how good a voice he had. That was the first requirement.

The next was temperament. A boy

might be bright and possess a good voice, but if he did not show artistic temperament, he would not be considered for a moment. Father Boone had an instinct for discerning this artistic quality in a boy. Lastly came voice. Most people would think that voice should come first, but he found from experience that an intelligent and artistic nature with moderate voice could be made into a superb singer. Nearly every boy has a good voice. It is the temperament and intelligence combined with the voice that constitute the singer. A hundred boys taken at random will sing "The Star Spangled Banner" creditably. They have the voice.

But to be a choir boy, more than sound was necessary. Father Boone's ideals were high. The choir must be a worthy adjunct to the divine service. The singing must be a prayer. Nothing was too good, or good enough, for the Lord. The choir must raise people's thoughts heavenwards. To sing the exquisite

music of the Mass properly, requires understanding and feeling. The music itself is difficult. When not rendered properly, it is a distraction rather than a help to devotion. Father Boone impressed this on the choir, and gave them a sense of their dignity and responsibility.

The boys were consequently a refined set of youngsters. They appreciated their position. They were looked up to by the people of the parish and were the envy of all the other boys. Besides, they were the best treated group of boys in Manhattan, for boys of their station in life. Every year they went to the Hippodrome in a body, *in style*. By style is meant a boy's idea of style—dressed in their best, with a box of chocolates in hand and a half dollar in pocket to spend as they liked, all expenses paid both ways, best seats, a soda before and after the performance, and the attention of everybody who saw them.

Several times a year they went, *in style*,

to see the Yankees and the Giants. They made altogether about seventy boys. They were divided in allegiance half and half for the Yankees and the Giants. No newspaper writer could give them any points on the game, not even the official scorer. It is certain that Mr. McGraw would have won a few more pennants if he had sat near them during a game.

But the great feature of the choir's amusement was the outings. A boy likes a circus, he enthuses over a ball game but he goes crazy over an outing, an outing *in style*. And the choir outings were *in style*. An outing was announced two weeks in advance. Father Boone was a regular P. T. Barnum. He knew that anticipation is more than half. From the announcement to the day itself, the lads were talking, arranging, dreaming the outing. *And it was an outing.*

Father Boone called the boys together three days before the event. To some he would say:

"You boys bring potatoes for the crowd."

To others:

"You bring condensed milk."

"You bring beefsteak."

"You bring sugar."

"You bring butter."

"You bring salt, pepper, and bread."

"You bring water pails."

"You bring pots."

"You bring pans."

"All of you bring your own cups, spoons, knives, forks."

"I'll bring a hatchet, the gun and coffee."

Nearly every home in the neighborhood knew when an outing was on. Every mother of a choir boy certainly knew. Each lad had his quota for which he was responsible. A choir boy would be stopped by a group on the street:

"When is the outing?"

"Where is it going to be?"

"Gee, you fellows are lucky!"

The choir boys knew when it was going to be, but never where. Father Boone kept that to himself. He had a new place each time, and the lads always said that the last place was the best. On the day itself, it is safe to say that the first thing the boys did on awakening was to look at the sky. About a quarter of eight they would begin to assemble with their packs. At eight sharp, Father Boone walked in.

He looked over the crowd—by a glance he could tell if everything was all right—and then gave his orders:

"Subway, Eighty-sixth Street, forward, march!"

Off they went in twos, threes, sixes. Any boy not on time missed the outing. This train never waited. The boys knew that. They knew that Father Boone would start on time if half were absent. Late meant no outing, for no one knew where the crowd was to camp out.

Perhaps it was over the Hudson on the

Palisades, or in the woods in Westchester County, or on the hills of Staten Island, but it was always a wild place—real Indian life. They arrived at the spot, made a clearing, and went scouting for water, wood, etc. In groups of from four to ten they formed bands, built fires, cooked their meals, and went trapping. They hunted everything—birds, squirrels, *snakes!* Yes, *snakes*. Lucky the boy who found a snake. He gave the yell, and in no time a dozen warriors were at his side. With clubs and stones, they followed the enemy until they numbered it among their scalps.

The older boys were allowed to take Father Boone's gun and do real hunting. If game were scarce, they tied a string to an old can and let it swing from a branch, firing at it in motion. That was great sport. The boy who made the most hits was decorated by Father Boone. They climbed trees, searched for fruit, were chased by bulls, played

Indian and cowboy, and were lost in the woods.

That was sport. It was given out that a boy who was in hiding was lost. Search parties were organized who went to various points, whence they converged, beating up the woods, looking into caves, climbing rocks as high as houses, and finally meeting at the rendezvous, sometimes with, sometimes without the lost brother. If he was not found, a concerted yell brought a triumphant shout from somewhere in the woods, and out came the lost chap, exulting that he had eluded the whole tribe. Then came the questions:

"Where were you?"

"I passed right by—did you see me?"

"Were we hot any time?"

"Show us the place."

And off they went to see for themselves. Then:

"I walked right near you."

"I thought you were there, but I was afraid to go in."

"Who'd have thought you'd dare go into that place!"

And so on.

Then came dinner. Oh, such a dinner! Delmonico's was nothing to it. Potatoes roasted by themselves! *By themselves*, do you understand? What if they were baked hard as a stone, what if they would have thrown them out the window if they were served at home? It was their own baked potato, the sweetest morsel that mortal ever tasted.

And the steak! Each boy cut a branch, made it into a fork, impaled his six inches square of tenderloin and held it over his own bonfire. Can you beat it? His eyebrows were scorched, his hands and his steak burned down to about three inches square, but no steak ever served was like that steak. He had to scrape off the burned corners and p'ck out the cinders, but when he put it on a tin plate, and covered it with butter and pepper and salt! When his eyes kept growing bigger

and bigger and his mouth began to water! Oh, Boy! Speak not to him while he was busy!

And then the coffee! That was Father Boone's own job. Two big boys went to a farmhouse with buckets for water. Someone had brought a big eight gallon pail. Father Boone drove two stout stakes into the ground three feet apart and placed a log on them. To this he attached the pail of water. The boys had secured a fine supply of wood, which lay near by.

He started the fire surrounded by the whole tribe. When the water came to the boiling point, he poured in several pounds of coffee. With a stick he stirred it up until it became yellow and thick. Then in went the condensed milk, as the lads gave a prolonged: "Oh—h!" As the mixture began to look luscious, the boys started to shuffle and rattle their tin cups and move closer to headquarters.

Finally the sugar was poured into the

smiling liquid, and there was a beverage fit for the Olympians! With a big dipper, Father Boone and some of the older boys filled the outstretched cups. Smacking of lips, rubbing of "tummies," and appeals for more! Years after, if you talked to a former choir boy about the outings, his first remark would be: "That was some coffee, boy!" After coffee, they sat around. I say *sat* advisedly. It was about all they were able to do. If you are a grown-up and don't know why they *sat* after the potatoes and steak and coffee, ask your Johnnie!

But I haven't told you the best part of the outing.

"What!" you may say, "could anything be better?"

Yes, Mr. Man. Father Boone let the fellows alone. *He let them alone!* They could do what they wanted. Ask any boy what that means. He knew his boys, he trusted them, they trusted him. He gave general instructions before setting

out, and left them to themselves. He never had to regret it. Never did a boy overstep. They all knew that if Father Boone told them what to do or not to do, it was final.

There was a story in the choir that, at a certain outing some years previously, a boy disobeyed orders. Father Boone said nothing at the time. At the next big outing, all were ready to start, when he said to a certain boy: "You did such a thing last time. It was against orders. You may go home." Just that. But it became history in the choir.

So, within the limits set, and they were generous, he allowed the boys to do as they pleased. After the coffee they loafed for an hour. Sitting in a big circle around him, or in smaller circles by themselves, they talked of their experiences of the day, and compared this with former outings. After that, it was wild Indian again until dusk, when they assembled for supper. Then came the packing up, the

putting out of fires, the march to the trolley, and, about nine P. M., home.

Nothing unites fellows so much as camping out. It makes one big family. The boys of St. Leonard's Choir, old and young, were knit together with dearest bonds. The strongest threads in these bonds were the devotion and tact of Father Boone.

V

ESIDES these amusements, the choir boys had others of quite a different, but no less enjoyable kind—billiards, pool, indoor games of various sorts, and a library. A library is not much without the right kind of librarian. Miss Kean, who had the care of the music, was also the librarian. She knew not only books, but boys as well.

You should hear the boys talk of the library! They declared that they had the best books to be found anywhere. Father Boone had assembled the kind of books that make boys forget to eat once they have started them. Besides being interesting, the books were educational and elevating in the best sense. Without knowing it, the reader was absorbing fine principles of conduct.

The result was that the choir boys had a certain distinctive character. They were known generally as manly and cultured boys. It is true that they made a rumpus occasionally, but not any more than Father Boone was aware of and approved. He did not mind how much they cut up, if it was fair play and play time. They might run about and rough it and make a racket, but if they caused no annoyance, he did not mind.

But when the signal was given for rehearsal, there was no more foolery. Every boy settled down to business as if the only thing in life was that rehearsal. With so many boys and the division into three choirs, discipline was absolutely essential. In fact, the masters used to say that nine tenths of the excellence of the choir was due to its fine discipline.

One day Mr. Harrington approached Father Boone enthusiastically:

"Father, I never enjoyed my work so much anywhere. In other places, nearly

all my efforts are spent keeping order. Here I never think of anything but my work. That's why I get such results. Why, in three weeks they get what other lads don't get in three months."

"Certainly, certainly, attention is the main thing, Mr. Harrington. That's why I'm so firm with them. Boys will take all the rope you give them, even if they tie themselves up and you with them. Moreover, I have noticed that they are never so happy as when they are under firm but fair discipline. Then they work when work is the word, and play when it's play. It is contrast that gives joy to life. Why, look at those lads now, every one of them jumping with joy. Do you suppose they'd be that happy if they'd had a loose rehearsal?"

"I'm sure you're right, Father, but I must say I never analyzed it before. Now that I reflect, it does explain why they are the jolliest set of lads that I know of."

"Of course, man, of course. Play is like sweets. Ice cream is a good dessert, but a

poor diet. Give a boy ice cream all day, and he'd run away from it."

The boys used to say that they did not know which Father Boone was more interested in, their work or their play. During rehearsal and church service, he was keenly alive to everything that concerned the choir, and when play began, he seemed to be a boy with them.

In fact, he often joined in their games of skill and competition. He did not seem to be over them, but one of them. And it was noticed that they never had so much sport as when he was in it. At times, when he showed reluctance to share their sport, they almost forced him into it. That was not often, for he seemed as desirous of joining them as they were of having him. He realized that they were giving up a good deal for their rehearsals, and he tried to make it up.

Of course they were getting a good deal, too. Few boys got such a fine vocal training as they did. And while it is true that

once their voices broke, they never came back as boy voices, they might come back as tenors or basses a few years later. Many former choir boys were filling lucrative positions as singers. Their vocal training never left them. Consequently, when as men their voices matured to tenor or bass, they had nothing to learn—they were artists.

But the rehearsals were not all dry as dust. The novice choir, it is true, was a monotonous affair. It was singing scales, and singing scales, and again singing scales. But the juniors had considerable variety. Moreover, both novices and juniors were present at the big rehearsal Friday night, not to sing, but to observe. They were also present at the church service to learn by watching and listening.

Sometimes at the big rehearsal, a junior would be called to substitute for a senior who was unavoidably absent. Then there was rivalry, craning of necks to see who the substitute would be, and a hope that someone else would drop out and give

another fellow a chance. The big choir exerted a real fascination over the younger lads. By attendance at the full rehearsal of men and boys, the juniors and novices frequently learned as much, and in some respects more, than in their own rehearsals.

It was a grand sight to look upon the sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses responding to the delicate demands of the choir master. He played with their voices as if they were a grand organ or a symphony orchestra. Sometimes the singing was as delicate as a zephyr, again it burst out in triumphant tones which rocked the room. But loud or soft, it was always under superb control. When we reflect that the Mass music is the sublimest that has ever been written, we can understand the effect of an artistic rendition of a masterpiece.

In this enthusiastic, artistic, ambitious choir, our little Bernard is now to make his appearance.

VI

THE great day had come. For two weeks Bernard had been dreaming of it. It was in his thoughts day and night. At last he was to be a choir boy! For reasons of his own Father Boone had set the day as October twenty-fifth. Those two weeks were like two years, or two centuries, to Bernard.

Every morning he counted on his fingers the remaining days. Then he would run into the kitchen where Alice was preparing breakfast.

"Sis, twelve days more!"

"Sis, eleven days more!"

And so on, until it got down to the day itself.

"This afternoon, Sis, at four, when you'll be at work! Oh, Sis, say a big prayer that it'll be all right!"

Alice was as much concerned as himself. How dearly she loved that little brother! Every penny she could set aside by stinting herself and denying herself, she devoted to his comfort and welfare. It was hard work, the two living on her slender wages. Rent, light, heat, food, clothing, ate up every penny. But, thank God! they had health. There was no expenditure for doctor or medicine.

And they had each other, so they did not have to look elsewhere for amusement. Lacking nearly everything that most people consider necessary, they had more real happiness than most people. Alice always made a bee line for home after her day's work, and Bernard, no matter where he was or what he was doing, was sure to be waiting for her, either at the car-stop or at home.

"I saw you first, Sis!"

"You naughty, naughty boy, what a fibber!" Then she kissed the naughty boy.

Alice, as soon as she got home, generally took out her paint-box and began work. Bernard, sitting near, told of the day's doings. She could have painted more than a dozen cards a week if she were considering money only, but she was looking ahead. She was not content with merely turning out work. She tried to make each picture better than the one before. She hoped that eventually her work would bring recognition, and that she could devote herself exclusively to art. She was, with her brush, what Bernard was with his voice; only she had no Father Boone to help gratify her ambition.

Sister and brother were exquisitely artistic. They were sensitive to the most delicate impressions. Sometimes while reading a story aloud, Alice would find herself repressing a sigh, and, looking up, see the moist eyes of her brother. But their tenderness was not weakness. When it came to doing what they should do, they were spiritual giants.

A year previously, Alice had lost a fine position because she resented the improper approaches of her employer. On his attempt to be familiar with her, she slapped him in the face, and before he could recover from his astonishment, seized her hat and coat, and left.

Bernard, too, was of the valiant type. One day he went on an errand for an invalid woman in the tenement next door, and as he was returning from the store with his purchase, two young toughs, both larger and stronger than himself, threatened to beat him if he did not give them some of the groceries.

"It's not mine, and even if it were, I'd not give it to you."

At this they proceeded to strike him and tried to tear away the basket from him. He not only held on to it, but in spite of a heavy beating, held on to one of the toughs until a policeman came up and arrested him.

Alice and Bernard were soft only in the sense that they were extremely sensitive to noble and tender sentiments. A little thing often gave them exquisite joy. A very little thing often caused them intense anguish. Their souls were like a photographic plate, which responds to the slightest impression.

"So, it's to be at four this afternoon, is it, Bernard dear?"

"Yes, Sis, Father Boone told me to call for him at the Rectory and that he would take me over."

"Well, at four your ears will be burning. I'll say the 'Hail, Holy Queen' and the 'Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,' and every prayer I know, so ardently that you'll surely hear me unless you're a naughty boy who never thinks of his sister."

"Well, if a boy has a sister who never thinks of him, why shouldn't he be naughty?"

"Bernard!"

"Even up, you know, 'even Stephen,' Sis!"

"Well, I'll see you first this evening, Bernard."

"I'll bet you don't, Sis!"

VII

AT three thirty, Bernard was at the Rectory door. In response to his ring, the doorman informed him that Father Boone was not in.

"Please look again, he must be in, he has an appointment with me."

"He's not in."

"Say, Mister, he told me to—"

The man was about to close the door, when, upon seeing the pained face of the little chap, he inquired:

"What time did he tell you to come?"

"Four."

"Oh, it's only half past three, child. You come again at four and you'll find him. He never misses an appointment."

Bernard did not like the "child"; however, he smiled his thanks and withdrew. After waiting a half hour, as he

supposed, he came back again. The doorman seemed surprised and peeved as he saw the lad.

"I said a half hour, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir, and here I am."

"Why, it's not a quarter of four yet. What's the matter, is it urgent?"

"Yes, sir, very."

"Come right in, then, and sit down. As soon as Father Boone comes in, you'll see him."

About ten minutes later (to Bernard it was two hours), the door opened, and from his place in the parlor, he could hear the doorman:

"There's someone waiting for you, Father, in Parlor 2."

"All right, I'll be down in a few minutes."

"It's urgent, Father."

"Oh, maybe a sick-call. Parlor 2, you say?"

In he walked to attend to the urgent business.

"Why, it's you! Anyone ill at your place?"

"No, Father, but you told me to—" but before he could finish, the priest was off, and Bernard could hear:

"I thought you said it was urgent, James?"

"Well, if it was life or death, it could not be more urgent than he made it, Your Reverence."

Smiling, the priest went upstairs, reflecting that a child may have a world all his own, even as grown-ups have.

As the clock was striking four, in walked Father Boone:

"You're on time, Bernard, that's good. It's better to be an hour ahead of your train than a minute after it."

"This was a long day, Father."

"Well, we'll try to make it a good day, too. Come along!"

They went through the corridor to the courtyard, which they crossed to the choir house. Bernard thought it was the

way to Paradise. As they neared the rehearsal room, the boys could be heard singing the scales. They began on time. Opening the door, they saw the novices seated upright and Mr. Harrington standing before them, shaping his mouth for each note the way he wanted them to do it.

As soon as the instructor saw Father Boone, he interrupted work to bow to him, and the boys saluted him heartily:

"Good afternoon, Father!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Harrington, good afternoon, boys!"

Meanwhile sixteen pairs of eyes were focused on the small chap at his side. Bernard was small, even for a little boy, but well set. They all knew him, as he was one of the boys of the parochial school, which all of them attended.

"Mr. Harrington, I've brought you a recruit. I know you don't like to take on a boy during the year, but I guess Bernard won't interfere much with progress. Bernard Kenney, Mr. Harrington."

"I'm glad to know you, Bernard, and I'm sure you'll be a real addition to us."

"Thank you, Mr. Harrington, and I hope you'll help me as much as you have these boys."

That pleased Father Boone. It was the speech of a little man. Mr. Harrington also felt pleased, it was such an unconscious compliment. At that, Father Boone withdrew. Mr. Harrington, with his accustomed tact, gave a few minutes' interruption.

"Hello, Barney!"

"Hello, Kenney!"

"How'd you get in?"

Bernard could not answer all of them at once, but he gave a composite smile and nod which satisfied everybody.

"Come sit next to me," urged one of the lads.

Another motioned to a vacant seat alongside: "Here's a good place, Barney."

It pleased Mr. Harrington to see that the new boy was a favorite. There was a nice family spirit in the novice choir which helped its efficiency greatly. He did not know that Father Boone gave this very thing his chief attention. The morale of the choir was his main concern. He often said that you could accomplish anything with an organization that had the right spirit, and nothing, if it was lacking. Hence he gave much thought and care to the selection and supervision of his boys.

Mr. Klein on a certain occasion remarked to him that it was astonishing how well the choir pulled together.

"Why, Father, it could almost do without a head; it seems to take care of itself."

"Mr. Klein, nothing takes care of itself but failure. That's the one thing that gets along without supervision."

Father Boone kept himself so much in the background that his constant care and

attention did not obtrude. He hated fussy people. He wanted those who would do things without calling attention to themselves. He made it a point to have only such assistants.

"Attention, boys!"

At the sound of Mr. Harrington's voice, every boy was keenly alert. Bernard was all eyes and ears. Up and down the scale they sang—"ou—ow—ah—aw." This they did in every variety of inflection, keeping the notes well in the head and to the fore.

Mr. Harrington explained how the roof of the mouth and the nasal passage constituted nature's music box. He showed them how to place the voice. It was easy enough to understand, but difficult to do. At times, some of the boys seemed a bit discouraged.

"That's all right, boys, Rome wasn't built in a day. They don't make a singer over night. That's why we have so much practice. Now, again, boys."

With good will they again took up the scales. Going over and over them, they finally came to the end of the hour. As Mr. Harrington was about to dismiss them, he looked towards Bernard:

"Come here, my little man, and let me see what you've learned to-day."

The rest of the boys gave a knowing glance at one another, expecting a jolly exhibition of vocal gymnastics. Bernard came forward. He looked even smaller than he was as he stood alongside the instructor.

"Now, open your mouth wide—that's it. Just imagine you're going to put an egg in it. There, now you have it."

The boys were getting ready for a good show. They nudged one another, realizing what an exhibition they made of themselves when first called on for individual work.

"Now, sing this scale after me."

Like notes from a bird, out came the clear, round tones and a perfect scale,

not a flaw in tone or notation. Mr. Harrington was dumfounded.

"Oh, I didn't know you had studied before, son."

"This is my first lesson, please."

Now the joke was on the boys. Their faces were a study. Every expression from wonder to incredulity was depicted on their countenances. More astonished than the most astonished boy, Mr. Harrington gazed steadily at the youthful prodigy:

"This is your first lesson?"

"Yes, please, but my mother was the best singer in all Ireland."

Ordinarily this would have started the boys giggling, but not after hearing such tones as came from his throat. Moreover, there was a charming innocence and simplicity about him as he uttered the words which would make anyone's heart go out to him.

"Do you know any songs? Have you ever sung anywhere?"

Without hesitation, out came the shocking avowal: "I sang in a saloon once."

Noticing the look of consternation on the master's face and the amazement of the boys, he quickly added: "I was just passing, and did it because they asked me in such a nice way. I think you would, too, if you were in my place, and if you saw tears in their eyes."

"Tears in their eyes?"

"Yes, please, they heard me singing when I did not know anyone was around, and I guess the song touched them."

Mr. Harrington and the boys were all attention. The little fellow had gripped them. There was no tendency among the boys to jolly him. His candor, simplicity, and sincerity, and above all his soulful countenance, awed them.

"Will you sing for us?"

"Gladly. Have you a choice?"

"Oh, then you have a number of songs?"

"Yes. Sis says, you know that's my sister Alice, that I have a big repertoire; that's what she calls it—repertoire."

This was too much for the audience. Bernard good-naturedly joined in the laughter. This made them like him more.

"Well, Bernard, what's your favorite?"

"Mother Machree."

"That's mine, too. Now, stand on the platform, and let us hear you. Shall I accompany you on the piano?"

"I thank you very much, but I sing it in my own way, and never quite the same way, according as I feel, and unless you knew me well, we might not do well together."

"Very well, by yourself, then."

He walked to the platform, stood for a moment buried in thought, then, looking at a distant point in the room, as though he saw someone there, began:

"There's a spot in me heart which no
colleen may own,

There's a depth in me soul never sounded or known,
There's a place in my mem'ry, my life, that you fill,
No other can take it, no one ever will."

He sang the last phrase slowly, lovingly, earnestly, his gaze riveted on that distant something which seemed to be communing with him. The last word floated in a leisurely way towards his unseen auditor. There was a brief pause, the silence so intense that the boys could hear themselves breathing. Not one of them moved the slightest bit. The suspense was dramatic. Out of the silence came a clarion note, full of rich sympathy:

"Sure I love the dear silver that shines in your hair,
And the brow that's all furrowed and wrinkled with care;
I kiss the dear fingers so toil-worn for me;
Oh, God bless you and keep you! Mother Machree!"

"Machree—ee." Birdlike, the last note divided and soared up an octave. Long it lingered until it seemed but an echo. As an echo, it played in the air, finally vanishing into the unknown.

Bernard stood as if in ecstasy. His audience was spellbound. Silence reigned, but only for some seconds. Then the boys broke out in rapturous applause. The spell was broken. They knew, as few boys could know, the merit of that performance. Boys do not readily create a hero. They are great levelers, but they are also just. If they give tribute, it is because it is due. They applauded and applauded. They did not wait for Bernard to come down to where they were, but rushed up to him.

"Good boy, Barney!"

"It was immense, Barney!"

"You're a regular McCormack, Barney."

All this and much more like it was accompanied by hand-shakes, pats on the

back, and eyes beaming wonder. And all the time the little fellow was absolutely devoid of self-complacency, but full of childish delight that he had pleased his companions.

Meanwhile, Mr. Harrington was a study. He sat dazed. He was apparently unmindful of what was transpiring. He had not come out of his trance. Suddenly Bernard realized that he had been singing at the master's request, and started towards him. He was by his side before Mr. Harrington came out of his reverie.

"I hope I pleased you, sir?"

The master stood up, and for answer folded the lad in his arms and kissed him on the head.

VIII

HEN Bernard left the choir room, he hastened home. It was about time for Alice's return. He was bursting with good news, and afire to tell it to her. He ran all the way home, but she had not returned. He ran back to the trolley line, which he had crossed on the way home. He stood on the corner, scanning each car as it stopped. No Alice. He thought she would never come.

Presently, as he was looking down the avenue, he heard a sweet voice behind him: "I saw you first!"

He was so glad to see her that he forgot his bet.

"What kept you so long, Sis?"

"Why, I am earlier than usual to-night. I came by the L, and walked over and down—that's how I saw you first.

Now you must pay your bet, but wait until we get home. Well, how was it, Bernard?"

"Oh, Sis, they're all fine over there. Father Boone was just like Mother to me, and the boys are the kind you'd like, and the master—that's what they call him—was awfully good."

"But that's not telling me how you came out?"

"Well, Sis, I got there on time, as you told me to be sure to do, and Father Boone took me by the hand and brought me over to the choir room. And then, Sis, he introduced me, if you please: 'Mr. Harrington, Bernard Kenney,'—just like that, in a nice, kind way. I was never introduced before, so I didn't know what to say, so I just bowed, you know the bow you taught me, the 'Little Lord Fauntleroy.'"

Alice was radiantly expectant. By now they had reached their flat. Entering, she threw her arms around him and gave him a hug and a kiss. Bernard liked

kissing no better than the ordinary boy, but it was different when it was Alice. The two were marvelously sympathetic and lovable, and they had no one else, and wanted no one else.

Alice had mothered him since he was a baby. The mother was an invalid from his birth, which left much to Alice. The mother was a combination of Alice and Bernard. The neighbors used to say that she was the sweetest and most patient woman they had ever known.

"You don't get the bet now, Sis, you've paid yourself."

"All right, little cheat, if you want to dodge your debts. But tell me about the choir and don't leave out anything. I want to know every tiny thing."

"Everything?"

"Yes, every tiny thing."

"Well, then, I'll begin with the beginning, although it's not a tiny thing. The first thing I did when I got up this morning was that I prayed like sixty.

Then, you didn't know this, but I got up an hour before you this morning and went to Mass and received. I offered up holy Communion for Mother, and prayed to her and the Holy Souls to help me. And they did, Sis. It was like this. After the rehearsal—"

"After what rehearsal? You're leaving out something."

"Oh, I forgot, or I didn't think it was worth while, but you know they were rehearsing when we entered. You know what a rehearsal is, no need of talking about that, just singing up and down, and up and down, and the same over and over again. Well, after it was finished, Mr. Harrington said: 'Come here, little man, and let me see what you've learned.'

"I was glad he didn't call me 'child,' like the man at the door. I said a 'Hail Mary' fast, and went to where he pointed. He showed me how to hold my mouth and how to send out the voice, but, Sis, it was the way I always did it any-

way. He ran over a scale, and I did it after him. Then he took another, and I did it the same. Then he looked at the boys and at me, and shook his head as if guessing what to do, and then he gave me a new scale which they didn't have in rehearsal. I took that easily.

"Then he cleared his throat and warbled a scale that went up and down, and in and out, and every way. He looked at me with a sort of challenge. I heard one of the boys whisper: 'That'll get him! That's a junior scale.' I didn't know what that meant, but I took it like the others, only more easily, because there was some music to it.

"Well, Sis, you should have seen his eyes, as big as saucers, and the boys were saying: 'Gee!' I knew then that it was a hard scale. Then he asked me to sing, and I went to the platform."

"Weren't you at all nervous, Bernard?"

"Not a bit, Sis. I wasn't even thinking about it. I just went there to sing. But

on the way, I thought of Mother, how happy she'd be if she knew I was in the choir and was going to sing for one of the masters. And, do you know, Sis, she seemed very near. I almost saw her. Anyway, I knew she was looking at me, and that she would hear me. So I forgot everything else and everybody else, and sang to her as I used to when she lay propped up in bed. Only it seemed that she was not in bed, nor like anything in the world, and that she wanted to hear me.

"And do you know, Sis, when I finished, I did not know for a moment where I was, and all was still as death. Then there was a noise, a clapping of hands and a rush, and the boys were on top of me, saying: 'Fine, Barney,' 'Immense, Barney, and they shook hands with me and patted me on the back, and seemed really fond of me.

"Then all of a sudden, I recollected that I was singing for the master. He was sitting in the chair, noticing nobody and

sort of dreaming. I went up to him, and said: 'I hope you're pleased, sir.' He sort of woke up and looked at me in a queer way, and he kept looking and looking. Then he stooped down and put his arms around me, and I could feel his lips press my hair. He never said a word. Wasn't that strange, Sis? Not a word—just walked out. But as I was passing downstairs afterwards, I heard him say to Father Boone: 'He's got it all,' whatever that meant."

Sis arose and did just what the master had done. Neither did she say a word, but led him into the room where they had a little altar of the Blessed Virgin, and kneeling, they said together the rosary in thanksgiving.

IX

AT the next rehearsal, Father Boone dropped in, as was his wont from time to time. After a few moments, he asked to hear the boys scale individually. When it came to Bernard's turn, he sang the scales like a bird.

"How old are you, Bernard?"

"I'll be nine, Father, in two months."

After the rehearsal, Father Boone came in again as the lads were leaving, and addressed himself to Mr. Harrington:

"He's rather young, but as far as I can see, he's losing time with the novice choir. What do you say about putting him with the juniors?"

"I was thinking of that myself, Father."

"Very well, then, would you mind seeing if he has left the house yet?"

The master called to Bernard as he was going out of the door. Presently he stood before the priest.

"Bernard, I'm going to do an unusual thing. I know it won't spoil you, for you are a good sensible boy. I'm going to put you with the juniors hereafter."

"I thank you, Father, and I trust I shall not disappoint you."

"All right, now, run home."

He got home all out of breath. Rehearsal was longer than usual that day, and he knew Alice was home before him. Running up the stairs three steps at a time, a thing which a boy can do even when out of breath, he burst into the room.

"Sis, Sis, I say, Sis, I'm a junior!"

"A what?"

With tremendous excitement: "A junior, Sis!"

As this did not convey any of his enthusiasm to her, he suddenly recollected that she did not know the mechanism of the choir.

"You see, Sis," he went on, still out of breath, "there's three grades, or choirs. The first is the novice, that *was* mine, that's for beginners. After a year, if they pass, they become juniors, and then, after a year, they are in the big choir. In one rehearsal, Sis, I'm jumped to the junior. It's the same as if I were ten instead of nine. A whole year gained!"

Alice's eyes were sparkling with joy and pride. There was no bet to pay this day, but she assumed one, and did what girls like to do, and boys don't.

At the junior rehearsal next day, Bernard was a bit shy. He felt rather out of place. Father Boone had brought him in and given him a seat without saying anything by way of explanation. Then he took his place in the rear and observed. There were a few thumbs pointed over the shoulder in the direction of the newcomer, and a few references to "the kid" when the rehearsal started.

There were boys in this choir all ready

to pass to the senior, awaiting only a vacancy. If, at the end of the year, no boy's voice broke, the second year juniors went up anyway, but usually during the vacation, at the end of June, half a dozen boys, more or less, felt a little huskiness in the throat, and when mid-September came, found their voices had broken. So there were from nine to fifteen vacancies in the fall. So well trained were the juniors that they stepped into the vacancies, and the choir went on as if no one had dropped out.

The rehearsal on this day went on as usual, beginning with easy work and continuing until it got so difficult that only seven or eight of the boys could execute it properly. The master stood before the boys as they sang. He could tell immediately if any boy was over his head. On perceiving any such, he made a well known signal, and the singer sat down.

To-day at the last quarter hour, during

the weeding out process, first one, then another boy got the signal. Finally there were but four left. Bernard was one of them. It was a fine entertainment to watch Father Boone's face, his gaze divided between the boys and Bernard. The boys were a study in amazement. Bernard seemed to be a mere spectator, so unconcerned was he.

By an arrangement with Father Boone, the master was to push the test to the limit to-day. If necessary, he was to go beyond the junior limit and take up senior work. Five minutes before the end, two boys were standing. Bernard was one of them. Then Mr. Harrington gave a scale which the juniors never had had before. It called for high range, which he played on the piano, and great flexibility.

He handed books with the scale notes to each of the two, and, beginning with the older, gave the signal to sing it. The first boy did it really well. The notation

was not perfect, nor did he strike the top notes altogether correctly. It was not expected that he should. Then to Bernard.

"Now, young man, let's see what you can do. Look over the notes again for a moment, and let me know when you are ready."

"I'm ready now, sir."

And without once looking at the book, he rendered the scale perfectly. Every inflection was correct, every note clear and round, the top notes particularly.

"You've seen this before?"

"No, sir, this is the first time."

"You did not look at the notes at all."

"I can't read notes."

"Can't read notes? Why, you've read that intricate scale without a flaw."

"I can do that with anything I hear once. After you played it on the piano, I knew I could do it."

"You mean you never even heard that scale before?"

"Never."

"Try this." The master played a very difficult selection from a Mass, and turned to the lad: "Did you ever hear that before?"

"Never."

It was a passage full of accidental notes, which even the seniors had difficulty in acquiring.

"Well now, let's have it."

"Would you mind, sir, playing it just once more? Our talk took away from me one or two notes in it."

Again Mr. Harrington played the passage, about three lines, a good long phrase. Then, like a bird, the lad took up the phrase and sang it through with exactly the same interpretation as the master gave it. Seeing the amazement of instructor and boys, he smiled, but they marveled all the more.

"I could always do that, as far back as I can remember. I know over a hundred songs, words and all, just from

hearing them. I never thought it strange. I thought most everybody could do it if they wanted to." The simplicity of genius!

The boys now crowded round him. They were not jealous. Jealousy is only among those more or less on a level. They realized that Bernard was on a higher plane, an eminence which they could never reach. With the frankness of boys, they admired him. Hero worship with boys is rare, but when given, it is genuine.

While they were expressing their admiration by compliments, exclamations, and friendly taps, he was thinking of Alice: "Sis will be glad to hear about this."

"Sis who?"

"Oh, I forgot, of course you don't know, but that's my sister Alice. I always call her Sis."

Father Boone now drew near.

"Well, little man, God has been good to you. You have marvelous talent, but

remember it is a gift of God. He might have bestowed your gift on any of these boys, but He has favored you." He then dismissed them.

Desirous as Bernard was to get home and give the good news to Alice, his first thought was now on something else. Around the corner from the choir house was the church. It was open every day from five in the morning, when the first Mass was said, until ten at night. The words of Father Boone were ringing in his ears: "It is a gift of God; He has favored you!"

For the first time in his life, he realized he had something that others had not. It did not make him proud. He was elated, of course, but not from conceit or superiority, but because God had been so good to him, and because he knew that all this would make Alice happy. Often she came home fatigued, yet tired as she was, she worked with her brush far into the night, and all for him, he knew.

But she always seemed repaid when she gave him something which she was able to obtain by her extra toil. He knew she was living only for him. And she knew that his first thought was of her. Not really his first thought—that was for God. She had taught him by word and example that God comes first.

When she left her good position last year, Bernard had said to her that the gentleman would no longer send him nice things. For her employer had pretended interest in her brother to insinuate himself into her favor. He had seen how devoted she was to her little brother. Alice's reply was that she would rather lose her position and health, and even him, than lose the friendship of God. They had to move into cheaper quarters and do without many things in consequence, but Alice always said that a hovel with God's love is better than a palace without it.

They generally said their prayers to-

gether every morning and night. It was their custom to thank God for some one thing of the day. Once Alice surprised her brother by thanking God for a severe disappointment.

"How's that, Sis? That's nothing to be grateful for."

"Not in itself, Bernard, but it's a great deal to offer it to God in the right spirit."

That opened his eyes to a new view of life. He saw that patience and love could give value to even undesirable things. But on this day, he had been made aware of a very desirable thing, a marvelous talent, as Father Boone called it. Of course that demanded thanks. He entered the church, and poured out his gratitude to God.

"O dear Lord, I thank Thee for being so good to me. I thank Thee for my voice, and for Sis."

Then he went to the altar of the Blessed Virgin: "O Blessed Mother, I beseech thee help me to thank God for

His goodness to me, and do thou show thyself a mother to Sis and me."

Then in thanksgiving he said the rosary, and, as he wanted to show God his gratitude in a special way, he offered Him a sacrifice: "Dear Lord, for love of Thee and in thanksgiving, I will abstain from candy one week."

Light-hearted and free as a bird, he now sped home. Alice was waiting for him.

"Oh, Sis, the bestest news yet!"

Alice waited expectantly.

"The very bestest, Al!"

"Well?"

"I've got something marvelous."

"You naughty, naughty boy, hurry up!"

"It's something special, wonderful; I found it to-day over in the choir room."

"Well, if you found it, you must give it back."

"It can't be given back."

"Now you've teased long enough. Tell Sis about it."

"What would you give to know?"

"That!" and she gave him the heartiest kiss in her repertoire.

"I've got a marvelous—, a marvelous—tal—, tal—, tal—"

She repeated: "Tal, tal, tal."

A rap at the door.

"Come in."

Bernard, looking towards the door, saw Father Boone. The next instant, Alice beheld a man and a small boy hand in hand and looking as chummy as brothers.

"This is Sis, Father, my sister Alice."

Alice blushed a bow and extended her hand. With a woman's instinct, she saw at a glance a Knight of Christ. She felt proud to see the interest and affection the priest showed her little brother, and she was doubly pleased to observe how trustingly and affectionately Bernard cuddled up to the priest.

"Won't you be seated, Father?"

He saw that supper was preparing. "Not now, some other time. I just dropped in to tell you what I am sure Bernard has already informed you of." She gave a knowing look at Bernard, who only winked his left eye.

"What I've come to tell you is that he's up to tricks very unusual in a boy of his age. In fact, I feel obliged to drop him from the junior choir."

Now it was Bernard's turn to be uneasy. Father Boone spoke so seriously that even Alice became alarmed. There was no wink in Bernard's eye now. Seeing how grave his statement made them, he continued at once:

"You see the junior choir is a preparation for the senior, but as Bernard is now ready for senior, I'm going to put him in the big choir."

The priest was prepared for a demonstration, but for nothing like what happened. Unmindful of a third party, they rushed to each other's embrace, and

amidst kisses and tears, had a brief realization of Paradise. At length they disentangled.

"So that was the marvelous tal—, tal—, tal—, Bernard?"

"Talent!" he exclaimed, as he beamed joy.

Father Boone placed his hand on Bernard's head and looked benignly on brother and sister: "Yes, Miss Alice, God has given him a marvelous gift. Mr. Harrington, who knows, considers it the best boy voice he has ever heard. I am saying this frankly before both of you. Ordinarily it would not be advisable to say this in a boy's presence, but Bernard is the sort of boy whom it will help rather than hurt.

"I was in the sacristy directly after the rehearsal, and I saw a little boy in the church telling his beads before the altar of the Blessed Virgin. I knew he was thanking God for the gift from heaven. A boy who realizes that he owes his talents to

God's favor will never become vain or conceited.

"I'm in a hurry now, but some other time I'll drop in and we'll have a good talk. Meanwhile, I wish you would consider me more or less a member of this close corporation. And I want to tell you that you have in each other more than all the wealth of Manhattan."

He bowed himself out, but only after Bernard had given his finger an extra squeeze. For a moment after his departure, sister and brother stood stock still, looking deep into each other's souls. Then Alice took out her handkerchief and turned aside. Bernard was beside her instantly, fondling her. But neither spoke.

X

ON Wednesday afternoons the boys of the big choir met for rehearsal. Ordinarily Mr. Harrington made them go over the entire program of the following Sunday. This was in order to make them familiar with the music for the final rehearsal Friday night, when men and boys, under the direction of Mr. Klein, the choir master, rehearsed the Sunday's service. When Mr. Harrington was occupied otherwise, Mr. Shore, the organist, conducted this rehearsal. As a result, Mr. Klein could give all the time of the final rehearsal to the phrasing and artistic rendering of the music.

Bernard was told to be at the music room for the Wednesday rehearsal. You may be sure he was on time. Some of the early comers, seeing the little chap, asked

him if he was looking for anyone. They never fancied that he was to be one of them.

Alice had told him to be very modest in his demeanor, and not to say or do anything which would lead the boys to think he was somebody. It was hardly necessary for her so to advise him, for he was a wise little fellow, and knew that any sign of conceit on his part would draw down on him the resentment of the others. Besides, he was naturally very unassuming and retiring.

"Hallo, kid, what's up? Waiting for anyone?"

"I'm waiting for Father Boone, please."

He was a little gentleman every inch. No one could help being refined with such a sister as Alice. That morning, before leaving for work, she had put his Sunday clothes in order, and seen to it that he would be spic and span for his debut into the big choir. She was careful also of his

language, always correcting him if he made a mistake and doing her best to minimize his use of slang, a hard task where a boy is concerned.

Presently Father Boone appeared. Bernard almost ran to him. They entered the choir room together. The others had not yet come in.

"Now, my little man, I'm putting you in the Senior, not to sing, but to pay attention. You do not read music yet, but you'll pick that up fast. Just follow the notes as the other boys sing. I've talked it over with Mr. Harrington, and we've concluded that this is best for you and for the choir."

"I thank you, Father, and I hope I shall repay your interest in me. Sis and I went to holy Communion this morning, so I'm sure everything will be all right."

The boys were soon assembled, and Father Boone brought Bernard to where they were seated.

"I have a little Caruso here, boys, but

he needs to grow a lot before we can use him. I have a special reason for seating him with you."

He placed him alongside one of the oldest boys and left. Mr. Harrington smiled at Bernard, who returned it graciously. During the interval of handing out the music, there were a good many inquiring glances cast at him.

One of the boys whispered: "That must be the kid that the juniors were talking about. They said he was a star."

"Yes, they said that he beat out Hughes on the final test. If he did that he must be a wonder, for Hughes has most of us beaten."

"Well, we'll see."

The rehearsal began, and the boys were so intent on their work that they forgot the newcomer. At length they came to a particularly difficult passage, which the master had to go over and over again. After a long delay on it, he had to

go on, even though he was not satisfied with it.

Bernard had executed the passage mentally, and felt that he could do it easily. Mr. Harrington also felt that he could do it. After finishing the Mass, he came back to the difficult part, and went over it again until they got it right. He then called, as was his custom, a number of the boys to do it individually. That was harder. In a crowd one is carried along and can do what one can hardly do alone. About half the boys failed to do it properly.

Finally, as a joke, one of them said: "Why not try Caruso, Mr. Harrington?"

They all took it up, looking smilingly at the little fellow. Bernard knew he could do it, but also realized that the boys who failed might feel hurt if he succeeded. He did not want that. Accordingly he showed very unmistakably that he did not want to try it. The boys became more insistent, and finally Mr. Harring-

ton added his voice to the request. As he still showed reluctance, one of the boys took him by the hand and gently forced him to the front. He still showed hesitation.

"Must I?"

"Yes, yes!" came from every side.

At a signal from the master, he began. He opened his little mouth into an oval, and, with head erect and perfectly unconscious of anyone's presence, sang the passage as if he were rendering a solo at a concert. When he stopped, there was absolute silence.

Then: "He's Caruso, all right."

"Gee! what a bird of a voice!"

"He's a fine kid."

"He's some singer!"

They crowded round him, and were proud of him, and told him so: "We'll let you off, kid, you won't have to ride the goat."

"You can keep the ten dollars initiation fee, Bo, and spend it on your mother-in-law."

And so, petting and jollying him, they wound up the rehearsal.

That night: "You see, Sis, I held back just as you told me, and just as I wanted to anyway, and I'm glad I did. If I went up at first, they'd say I was trying to show off. They are an awfully nice set. Why, Sis, they gave me ten dollars!"

"And did you take it?"

"Why not?"

The look of consternation on her face was so pronounced that Bernard at once laughed: "Oh, it wasn't real money, Sis, it was just the initiation fee which they let me off." Then he had to run and do some dodging.

Friday night came. The rehearsal room was an imposing sight. All were there, novices and juniors included—Mr. Shore at the piano, Mr. Klein with his baton, Mr. Harrington and the men in the rear, the boys in front, Father Boone now here, now there. Bernard was all eyes. The choir master rapped for attention. The

piano played the prelude, and then softly, sweetly, the full choir took up the theme. It seemed that the music was rendered very softly, but Mr. Klein did not think so.

"This opening, please, is pianissimo; I want it sung pianissimo, as soft as possible."

Again it came out so softly that Bernard was astonished that the full choir was singing.

Again Mr. Klein: "Gentlemen, this passage is pianissimo; I want it pianissimo." He always addressed the full choir as: "Gentlemen." Imagine Bernard!

At length when the passage was down to a mere suggestion of sound, he passed on.

When they had finished the Sunday program, they took up the Christmas music. It was now the middle of November, with but five Friday rehearsals ahead of them. They were to do Gounod's "St. Cecilia." The soprano solos were always

taken by the leading soprano, who was called the Leader. It was a great distinction.

It was hard to replace a leader. Father Boone always had one or two superb voices in reserve for this position, but he was never sure that they could fill it. It called not only for voice, but for assurance. The leader had to attack the chorus parts without hesitation. If he faltered, the others did also. Time and again, a boy would take the leader's place and do well in rehearsal, but, at the church service, where he felt his responsibility, he would waver. That made the others falter.

It was the biggest worry Father Boone had in the choir. So far he had been fortunate. His leaders one after another had been capable. The present leader was Leon Ruggeri. He had an exquisite voice and full confidence in himself. The choir at this particular time was the admiration of the city. People came from

all over to hear it. It embellished the divine service in a most dignified manner. Ruggeri was now entering his sixteenth year, and was at his best, but he knew, and Father Boone knew, that the voice of a boy at its best is close to collapse. However, in Leon's case, there was no indication so far of such an untoward occurrence.

The rehearsal accordingly went on satisfactorily. Bernard could not read music, so the score which he held in his hand did not help him any. But once he heard a melody, he got a death grip on it.

Indeed, most boys, even those who have been well schooled in reading music, depend mostly on their ear in singing. The notes serve as a guide to a certain extent, but in many cases, if a new piece were placed before a boy and he were asked to sing it before having heard it played, he would make poor work of it. But let him hear it played once or several times, and the notes will enable him to sing it creditably.

An amusing confirmation of this may be given. On a certain Sunday during Lent when the choir was in the chancel, the assistant librarian gave the wrong Mass to the boys. The organist, director, and men singers received the right copies, but the boys got Gounod's "Third Mass" instead of Gounod's "Sacred Heart Mass." The director did not know of the error, or he would have had a stroke of apoplexy. And strange as it may seem, the boys, with one or two exceptions, did not know of the error. It was only after the service that they realized that they had sung one Mass perfectly from the score of another. The words were of course the same. They paid attention to the words, but the music was all by ear. When the director was informed of the mistake, big beads of perspiration came out on his forehead at the mere idea of what might have happened. But he could have spared himself the agony if he were not a great musician, for boys, when put

to it, can do the unexpected, and often the impossible, from the viewpoint of their more knowing elders.

Father Boone considered that it would be a year before Bernard would be of service, and that meanwhile he had had enough exploitation, so he apparently left him to himself. Christmas was drawing near, and the rehearsals were mostly for that occasion. This year Christmas fell on Monday.

On the preceding Friday evening the last rehearsal was to be held. Father Boone was busy attending to details, when a boy approached him to say that a young lady was below to see him. As it was close to the rehearsal hour and he was still busy preparing for it, he sent word that he could not see her.

The messenger came back stating that it was Leon Ruggeri's sister, and that she wanted to see him for a moment only. At the name Ruggeri, visions rose. Everything calamitous assailed his brain—voice

broken, arm broken, leg broken! "I'll have him here if it takes an ambulance!"

He was downstairs presently: "Good evening, Beatrice; no bad news of Leon, I trust?"

"He's got an awful cold, Father, he can't talk above a whisper. He was extremely importunate that I should see you and excuse him, and say that he would surely be all right by Sunday."

Father Boone was stunned. Yet it could be worse. A cold was manageable. There were four days. He would get a specialist for Leon. Meanwhile—!

After thanking Beatrice for her trouble, he bade her good evening and hastened upstairs. There was a hurried consultation among the masters. Mr. Harrington and Mr. Shore suggested Burke as leader for the time being. Mr. Klein seemed to prefer Rogers. Both were good. But a leader is a leader. However, there was nothing to do but proceed.

In deference to Mr. Klein, Frank Rogers

was called to the front and given the leader's seat. He did well. There was some hesitation, but that was to be expected. The director was congratulating himself on his judgment of Rogers, when, at a particularly delicate part of the Credo, the leader stumbled. Mr. Klein was not greatly concerned and started the passage again. This time it was worse. The old story: one never fears an accident until it happens, and then one fears it all the time. Rogers became panicky.

It was now Mr. Harrington's turn to shake hands with himself. Burke was called forward.

"Edward, I want you to try this—I know you can do it."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Klein, and I thank you for the honor."

His best was very good. He got through the entire Mass without a break. Of course he was not Ruggeri, but that was not expected. But the rehearsal was what they termed "dead." Father Boone

did not say or do anything during the entire hour and a half. Yes, he did do something—a lot of worrying—but no one was aware of it.

Next day, bright and early, he was at the Ruggeri home. After the usual formalities, he went in to see his leader. What a sight! Leon's face and throat were swollen and inflamed. No doubt his anxiety to get into condition had aggravated his malady. The poor boy was hardly able to smile without pain. In returning Father Boone's greeting, a husky whisper came from his throat. Although dreadfully upset, Father Boone gave no indication of it.

"It's Saturday, Mrs. Ruggeri—that gives us nearly three days. With your permission, I'll have our throat specialist around to see him this morning."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, and as I want to coöperate with you in every possible way, I shall be glad to have the specialist see him."

He then left, and on getting home, telephoned to Dr. McFarlan. About noon, in walked the physician to give his report.

"The boy has a bad throat. I've done everything possible for him, but don't count too much on him for Christmas. In fact, I may as well tell you not to count on him at all."

"I thank you, Doctor, for your candid expression of opinion. I know now just where I stand."

They chatted for a while, when Dr. McFarlan took his departure.

Father Boone was a man of action. He sent a messenger to Burke's house and to Mr. Harrington, asking them to see him in the music room at three. On meeting them, he was the personification of confidence.

"I should like you to go over the entire program with Edward, Mr. Harrington, very painstakingly. To-morrow after Mass, I shall announce an extra rehearsal

at four. It will be in the church and with full choir."

"That's splendid, Father, it's bound to come out all right. You know me. I'm going to do my best with Edward." He spoke enthusiastically and set to work earnestly.

Next day at four, the full choir was in place in the church. The rehearsal began propitiously. All realized the predicament, and did their best. They were very devoted to Father Boone, and gave evidence of it by their efforts. The Kyrie went off apparently as well as if Ruggeri were the leader. Father Boone smiled approval and Mr. Harrington nodded encouragement. Mr. Klein was satisfied.

Next came the Gloria, the "St. Cecilia" Gloria! Gounod must have had a vision of the angels singing on the first Christmas morn when he composed that Gloria. It opens with a clear delicate strain, as if a rift were made in the sky and an angel's voice came out of heaven.

Mr. Klein had arranged this opening phrase to be sung by the leader alone. The clear soprano voice was the closest approximation to the angelic strain which rang from the heavens the first Christmas dawn. Burke took up the strain which follows the priest's intoning of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

He began: "*Et in terra pax hominibus—*"

The phrase sings slowly, majestically, rising to a clear altitude of spiritual joy. As Burke proceeded, his voice floated through the empty church, echoing down the vast spaces. Suddenly he stopped. He had never heard his own individual voice in the church before. He realized he was the soloist, his nerves began to assert themselves. He got a nervous throat, which to all intents and purposes is the same as a sore throat.

Speakers as well as singers get it. For the time being it is a malady. When the strain is over, the malady vanishes, but

at the time, the voice is gone. Edward Burke was done for, for that day, as a soloist. Rogers was now summoned by the director, but somehow he felt he could not carry the part. His very apprehension was sufficient to incapacitate him.

There was a consultation. Four more boys were tried. None gave assurance of being able to do it. Finally it was agreed to have the best six singers do it together. Lo and behold! Burke's voice came back, Rogers's nerve returned. It was the absence of individual responsibility.

After the Gloria there was a little intermission. Bernard's seat was near to where Father Boone was standing and talking to the director.

"The change goes fairly well, Mr. Klein, but the effect is not at all the same."

"I realize it fully, but we've got to make the best of it."

At this juncture, Father Boone felt a

little hand on his finger, and noticed a pull on his coat. Turning, he saw Bernard looking up at him.

"Please let me try it, Father?"

"Try what?"

"That part they couldn't do."

"Sit down, child, and don't worry me."

The "child" did not appeal to Bernard at all. However, he began to realize how bold he had been. The rehearsal was resumed, and when it was over, promised well for the morrow, with the exception of the solo part, which occurred not only in the Gloria, but in several other parts of the Mass, and was to be taken by the six.

Just before dismissing the choir, Father Boone happened to look in the direction where Bernard sat. The little fellow's eyes were focused on the priest. There was a yearning in his countenance and a spirituality in his look which, for a moment, made Father Boone fancy he was looking at an angel. A sudden inspiration came to him.

"Just a moment, gentlemen, a moment, boys. There is a little chap here whom I want you to hear. It's only a moment. He gives great promise. I want you to hear him."

Men and boys stopped their preparations for departure, and awaited events.

"Now, Bernard, this is new and strange to you. We don't expect you to do it like Leon or the other boys, but just let the choir see what kind of voice you have."

He gave him the Gloria, and indicated to the organist to play the introduction. Bernard stepped upon the leader's platform, looking very diminutive but very self-possessed. Men and boys were anticipating a childish attempt. They were in an attitude of silence and expectation out of regard for Father Boone.

Suddenly a note issued from somewhere. No one believed it came from that tiny lad, but no one else was singing. Keenest scrutiny was depicted on every face. Scrutiny changed to wonder as the

voice grew richer, clearer, steadier. The pure round tone went ringing through the church as if an angel were somewhere voicing glory to God.

He ended. Not a sound was heard. After that voice, any movement seemed desecration. All were under a spell. Boys and men were enthralled. The first break in the silence came from the singer himself, as he whispered:

"Won't you let me sing it, Father? Please, Father?"

No answer.

"I know all the Mass, Father."

Still no answer.

"Just try me, Father, please!"

A pause.

"I will, Bernard. Gentlemen and boys, I'm going to ask you a favor. You're tired, I know, but I should like to try again the parts of the Mass which call for the soprano solo."

There was not the slightest dissent.

Mr. Frost, the basso, arose: "I suggest,

Father, that we go right through the Mass with this boy as leader. I'm a busy man, but this means so much to us and to you that I make the proposal."

Before Father Boone could reply, the proposal was heartily approved by everybody present. Bernard retained his place on the leader's platform. He was several years younger than the youngest boy of the choir. He never seemed so small as now. But his voice was out of proportion to his size. He used it with such perfection, although untaught, that it came out without impediment, and he had such assurance that it sounded with the natural brilliancy of a voice which is free and spontaneous.

The rehearsal went through without a halt. From the beginning to end, the little leader led. He had not paid rapt attention for nothing during the past months' rehearsals. With the aid of the organ, he seemed to know the Mass as well as he knew "Mother Machree."

It was getting late, and at the word to dismiss, it was expected that all would quickly depart. Instead, they came up to Bernard, shook hands with him, patted him on the back, whispered compliments and encouragement to him, and in various ways made him feel that they approved him and were proud of him. Even Rogers and Burke whom he had replaced felt no twinge of jealousy.

Rogers patted him on the shoulder: "Great! It was great, little man!"

Burke, while shaking hands: "You've saved the day, kid, put it there. I want you to know that I'm for you all the way."

Father Boone and Mr. Harrington observed all this, their faces one broad smile.

Mr. Klein beamed satisfaction on the organist: "I tell you, Mr. Shore, the boy's a prodigy. What a lucky stroke Father Boone made!"

Pleased as a boy, Mr. Shore giggled: "I

knew he'd do it if he got the chance, I knew it."

They were departing fast when Father Boone motioned to Bernard to hold back. When they two were alone, he took the boy by the hand:

"Bernard, I expected a good deal of you, but you've gone way beyond my highest hopes. I want you to know it. I'm not afraid it will turn your head. Just bear this in mind—that you owe God more than most boys do. Now run home and tease Alice."

XI

HE ran.

When he reached his tenement, he had to pause for breath. If he had been bringing home a million dollars, he could not have been so happy. He would not take a million dollars for what he was carrying to Alice. Dear, good Alice, who was living mainly for him! Sweet Alice, who felt rewarded for all her sacrifices by his smile and his kiss!

She was at home, of course. This was Sunday, her day for straightening out little things. Usually she took a walk with her brother on Sunday afternoons, but today her brother was otherwise engaged.

Among other things, Alice answered her letters. On one she delayed endearingly. It was to Sister Mary Ambrose, her dearest friend and confidante. Sister

Ambrose had taught her in the parochial school, and ever since there had been a bond very much like that of mother and daughter between them. Sister Ambrose alone was aware of Alice's great hope in life. Not even Bernard knew it.

Alice was wonderfully impressed by the self-sacrifice of the sisterhood. She knew several young ladies of distinguished family and splendid prospects in life who had given up everything to serve God's poor for the love of Jesus. There was no salary, no notoriety, no earthly recompense—it was done as an act of love of God, a complete consecration of life to His service who gave His life for us.

She was immensely impressed by this consecrated life of sacrifice and service. She had confided to Sister Ambrose her purpose of becoming a nun when she should see Bernard settled securely in life. She had just finished writing to Sister Ambrose and sealed the letter, when in burst Bernard.

"Oh, Al, Al!"

He could get no further. He generally addressed her as "Al" when highly elated. Whenever she heard herself called "Al," she knew that something big was coming. But now nothing seemed to come except his heavy breathing.

Again he ventured: "Al, oh, Al!"

He could say no more, but rushed to her arms, buried himself in her bosom, and trembled with emotion. Knowing his sensitive and affectionate nature, she realized that it was joy which caused his emotion. She could read that on his face when he came in. She recognized it in his voice, and above all in his salutation. And she knew that the greatest element in his joy was the pleasure he was to give her. She knew him, so she said nothing. Taking his hand, she patted it and raised it to her lips.

Presently his emotion moderated, and he looked up into her face with the smile of an angel.

"Al, I'm to sing in church to-morrow."

"Well, Bernard, to get so excited over that!"

"It's more than that, Al."

"Then perhaps you are going to preach the sermon at the high Mass?"

"I won't say it's more than that, but it's pretty near."

"Well, let's have it."

"Al, I'm almost afraid to say it. Honest, Al, it's too much to be real."

"Well?"

"Pinch me good and hard, Al, I want to see if I'm dreaming or not," at which Alice gave him a good pinch, first because she was getting excited, and then because she had to give vent to her feelings.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Well, you told me to give you a good one!"

"Then I'm awake, Al? It's not a dream? Al, I—, I am—, I am—, oh, Al, I am—"

"I should say you are!"

"Guess what, Al?"

"Crazy!"

"You've said it, Al, I'm crazy with joy."

"Well, you'll have me crazy too if you don't come out with it."

"Well, Al, I—am—to—be—, to be—, to be—, I am to be—, Al, I am—"

"Now be a good boy and stop teasing. Don't you see how worked up I am?"

"I've got to tease you, Al."

"Got to?"

"Yes, Al, Father Boone said: 'Run home now and tease Alice.' "

"No such thing!"

"Cross my heart and breath, Al!"

"Father Boone told you to tease me?"

"Honest to goodness, Al."

"So that's why you came in trembling?"

As she looked down into his face, she beheld a wondrous vision of angelic innocence, and a smile that would adorn a cherub, and as she gazed, the cherubic mouth opened:

"Al, I am to be the leader of the choir to-morrow!"

"You, the leader?"

"Yes, Al."

"Why, you're only just in!"

"That's why I told you to pinch me."

"Tell me more."

"It was like this, Al. You see the regular leader was absent, very ill, bad sore throat. They tried out Rogers, who is next, and Burke, who comes after him. I'm too excited to tell you all, Al, but anyway at the rehearsal this afternoon, Burke was doing wonderfully well until he came to the solo which opens the Gloria. Then he got rattled. He tried again—worse! You know how it is when a fellow gets scared.

"Well, they tried four or five, but I guess rattles is catching, for they all got shaky when they heard their own voices. Father Boone was disappointed, but he made the best of it, as you know he always does. He had six boys together sing the

solo part. It went all right after that, but near the end I heard Father Boone say to Mr. Klein: 'It'll do, but it's not at all what I wanted.' I could see he was downhearted. Now, Sis, don't chide me, or think I was forward, but I knew I could sing that solo—"

"The idea, Bernard, how could you?"

"Wait now, wait, Sis, before you get cross."

"Well, go on."

"I just tugged at Father Boone's coat until I caught his eye, and I looked him straight in the face, and I tried to tell him with my eyes, but he didn't understand. Then, I said, sort of afraid (you see, I didn't want to be forward), I said: 'Let me try it.' At first he was annoyed, then suddenly he turned to the choir and said he wanted them to hear me sing. You see, it was his way of starting.

"Well, Sis, I was just as cool as I am now—cooler. I knew I could do it. I had followed the Mass word for word the

whole month, and knew the music by heart, and almost knew the words. They were Latin, you see. If they had been English, I should surely have known them. I took the leader's platform, Father Boone told me to, and got ready to sing.

"I could see the fellows winking at one another and smiling, and the men looked a bit displeased, but I didn't mind anything. Father Boone looked terribly serious. The organ played, and I came in right on time. A wonderful feeling came over me, Sis. Everything was so solemn and quiet, and there was the altar, and the tabernacle, and the statues of the Blessed Virgin and the saints—it was all just like heaven.

"When the organ began, I thought of the manger, and the Blessed Mother, and the shepherds, and the angel choir. And, Sis, I also thought of Mother, and how glad she would have been to see me singing there. All this was in a flash, but it made me feel as I never felt before. I

did not know anyone was present. I was singing to the Infant Jesus and His Virgin Mother and good St. Joseph.

"When I finished the solo, I did not know for a while that I was in church. I was in Bethlehem. It was awfully silent for a moment, then I heard whispering, and soon a rush of feet, and then the boys were around me saying nice things. Well, Sis, to make it short—"

"I don't want it made short."

"The rest after supper, please, Sis, except to say that I was made leader until Leon returns, and to-morrow, Christmas Day, Sis, I'm to sing the solos!"

XII

HE high Mass on Christmas Day was at the same hour as on Sunday, eleven A. M. The Christmas service at St. Leonard's was always impressive. The sanctuary, on this and like occasions, was beautifully decorated, the altar boys were superbly arrayed, the sermon was excellent, and the music inspiring. No wonder people were usually turned away. On this Christmas Day, every inch of space was occupied some time before Mass began.

The choir boys assembled in the rehearsal room for their half hour of preliminary work. Their voices were in rare form as they got the signal to march in procession to the choir. There the men were already seated. The organist was playing variations on the *Adeste Fideles*.

Mr. Klein was graciously awaiting the opening of service.

Father Boone and Mr. Harrington entered side by side and took their accustomed places. Presently the altar boys appeared, Mr. Klein waved his baton, and the choir sang the processional, as the altar boys and clergy proceeded in dignified manner from the sacristy into the sanctuary.

Mass began. The Kyrie, that plea for mercy which priest and choir send up to God at the very beginning of the Holy Sacrifice, was heard plaintively resounding through the church. As the full chorus reached a climax, one felt like beating one's breast and crying out: "Lord, have mercy on me, Christ, have mercy on me!"

The music was a sublime prayer, it raised mind and heart to the world beyond, it became the handmaid of the Lord, presenting Him with the congregation's act of contrition.

There was one person in that congregation whose heart was moved beyond others, whose prayers, yes, and tears, were pleading with the Lord, not for herself, but for one in that chorus. Alice had arrived at church a half hour before Mass. Devoutly she prayed for God's blessing on her brother, earnestly she thanked Him that Bernard was privileged to sing His praises at holy mass.

Then she meditated on the mystery of the day, the Nativity. She reflected that the Son of God left His home in heaven and was born in a stable for her—*for her.* He came helpless, poor, in discomfort, and all His life, it was poverty, loneliness, and finally pain and death—for her.

She recalled what Sister Ambrose once said—that God became man not to give us riches, nor a long life, nor health, nor anything which this world could give, but solely to give us life everlasting with Himself. God became man, said good Sister Ambrose, in order that

man might become in a certain sense divine, "that we might be made partakers of the divine nature." God's birth as man was man's birth as a child of God!

These reflections shot through her mind and filled her with gratitude. She felt she could suffer poverty, illness, accident, anything, for the love of the dear Lord, who became man that we might share His bliss for all eternity in heaven. She realized keenly the significance of sacrifice. Now she understood more fully why so many noble, grateful souls leave all things for God, who left His home in heaven for them. It was a return of love for love.

Her reflections were broken by the processional. She was almost sure she could distinguish Bernard's voice. Heaven forgive her if she was distracted!

After the Kyrie, the priest intoned the *Gloria in excelsis Deo.* Hardly had his voice ceased when from out the silence

came clear, sweet tones as from heaven: "*Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.*" It was a single voice, it gripped, it thrilled. It was a rapt congregation, as the pure tones hovered over and around them. It raised hearts heavenward. It seemed to come from another world and to raise one's thought above earth. The power of music! If the poor efforts of the children of earth sometimes enthrall, what must be the melody of choirs angelic!

There is always reverent silence during Mass. Usually while the choir sings the congregation pray or meditate. But at the sound of Bernard's voice a marked stillness accentuated the silence. Lips that were moving in prayer stopped, motionless. Fingers that were telling beads suddenly halted. Faces until now in contemplative repose took on an air of surprised animation. Heads bowed in meditation suddenly became erect. It was as if an angel's voice had somehow taken flight to

earth. It was a little bit of heaven. Everybody was thrilled. If it were not for the sacredness of the place there would have been a demonstration.

Alice scarcely breathed as she recognized Bernard's voice. She held herself tense until the last note of the solo died away, when she seemed to drop from a great height. He had gotten over the important part. Father Boone was pleased, she thought.

The Mass went on impressively to the end. The sermon was talked of for a long time afterward. Its main point, on which Father Pardow insisted over and over again, was that Christ's birth as a mortal was our birth to a blessed immortality, if only we did our part.

Near the end his discourse was inspiring: "What matter the hard things of life if eventually they bring us to unending life? And what value have the good things of life, if in the end we lose the possession of God? O Lord, deal with me

as Thou wilt here, provided I be with Thee forever hereafter!" With a brief exhortation he ended.

The music, the sermon, the Mass, sent the congregation away with the realization that, although they must live in the world, they must not live for the world. In particular, Alice found herself recalling such thoughts as these: The Babe of Bethlehem had made them children of God, members of the family divine. That was the meaning of Christmas. Life had a tremendous significance, since it gave to each one the opportunity of sharing the life of God. "To as many as received Him, He gave the power to be made the sons of God."

And further: Provided God's will be the rule of conduct, the meanest life is worth living, the poorest beggar is rich, the greatest suffering is gain, the shortest life is an eternity. . . . Life is but the first step of existence, the path only to our true home, and whether long or short matters

little. What really matters is whither it leads.

Again: Christ was God's gift to the world to show His love. "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son." The divine Babe was God's Christmas gift to man, a token of His love, the measure of His love. God asks our love in return: "Child, give Me thy heart."

Absorbed in such thoughts as these, which were the echo of the sermon, Alice made her way home. One thought was dominant in her mind, she almost expressed it aloud: What shall I give the Lord to show my love? "I will give Him myself—He gave Himself for me. Myself shall be my Christmas present to Him, myself to serve Him as best I can now, and to consecrate myself to Him entirely by vow when I can do so as a nun."

Then she thought of Bernard. Her life was dear to her, but he was dearer to her than life. What if God should take Bernard? She tried to put away the

thought—it was too dreadful—but it came back. "O God," she murmured, "not that, not that!" But the thought would not leave her, it became insistent. Finally she prayed: "O my God, I love Thee, Thou knowest I love Thee, Thy holy will be done, Thou knowest best!"

Just then she rounded the corner of her street, and saw a pair of legs in fast motion making for her. Bernard could not await her coming. He had been watching for her the last ten minutes. He was afraid to go to meet her for fear she would come by a different way. He had run home at top speed, expecting to find her. Every minute seemed an hour. He could not understand her delay.

With a dash, he was alongside her. If they had not been in the street, he would have embraced her. He could hardly contain himself. Hand in hand they walked along. Somehow Alice was never before so glad to have him near her. She held his hand so tightly he marveled at it.

He did not know what her thoughts had been just previously. To her it seemed that he was restored to her from some dreadful fate. She clung to him as if he might be torn from her. And so, neither of them speaking, she from overwrought feelings, he from sympathy, they reached home.

XIII

LEON was a long time getting over his cold. Before he was entirely over it, he ventured out, and a relapse set in, resulting in pneumonia. It was some months before he was himself again, and then he found to his dismay that his voice had broken. It was a severe blow. However, he knew that he had been leader longer than anyone before him, and that his voice would change sooner or later, so he made the best of it.

Meanwhile, Dr. McFarlan having early informed Father Boone that Leon would never be able to sing again, even if he thoroughly recovered, Bernard continued as leader. Good as he was from the beginning, he improved steadily. He had an instinct for music. If given a new piece

to sing, he would phrase it in such a way as to bring out hitherto unrevealed beauty.

His voice was continuously increasing in volume and rotundity. At Mass it could be readily distinguished among all the others. His solos were soul flights. They transported the congregation to a spiritual realm. Soon his name was mentioned outside the parish, and before long the whole city knew of him. Famous singers, artists of national repute, came to hear him. All went away immensely impressed.

Those who saw him personally were as much taken by himself as by his voice. He was in every sense a charming little fellow. He never put on airs. His naturalness was one of his most winning traits. He never spoke of himself, never put himself forward, yet he never required urging. He desired to accommodate everybody in everything.

An instance of this. After the Mass on

Easter Sunday, when the choir boys had returned to the music room and put their things away and were about to go home, a party of ladies and gentlemen appeared and asked to see the soloist. Among the party was a world renowned singer.

Father Boone introduced Bernard to the distinguished company, who were quite surprised that such a little boy had such a strong voice. They were about to depart when one of the ladies said:

"I'd love to hear you sing, but I suppose you're too tired after the long service."

He looked at Father Boone, and perceiving it was his pleasure that he should comply, said graciously: "I love to sing; I'm never too tired for that."

He sang "The Rosary"—rather he prayed it. It was a rapt audience that listened. An almost sacred silence ensued. Without score, without effort, without self-consciousness, he sang it as if inspired. When it was over, the great

singer was spellbound. One of the ladies threw her arms around him and kissed him, a performance he submitted to with horribly bad grace.

They were so charmed that they asked for another song, then another and another, until over half an hour passed by. To the audience it seemed but a moment. Finally, as he was concluding a song, they noticed he was turning pale. At the end he almost fell.

Father Boone rushed to him: "What's the matter, Bernard?"

To which he whispered: "I'm hungry, Father, I've not had my breakfast yet."

Forgetting the presence of the visitors, Father Boone almost shouted: "Not had your breakfast yet! And it's twenty minutes to two!"

"I'll tell you about it afterwards," he whispered, imploring silence.

But Father Boone was so amazed that he could not restrain himself.

Turning to the party: "This boy is

faint for food. He's had no breakfast yet."

A cry of astonishment came from all present. They glanced hurriedly at one another, and one of them said:

"Let him come in our machine, Father; he'll be at the hotel in a few minutes, and we'll see that he has his breakfast."

To this, however, Bernard dissented.

"Alice is waiting for me," he said.

They compromised by taking him to his home in their car. On the way over, the great singer inquired into his condition, in order to find out if it was poverty that kept him without breakfast. On perceiving it was not, he inquired further about the matter, and to his astonishment, found that the little fellow was something more than a singer.

"I've always found, sir, that I sing better if I've not eaten, so of late I never take anything until after high Mass. It would have been all right to-day except for the singing afterwards."

The great singer pressed his little hand. The ladies wanted to kiss him, but, weak as he was, he resisted that indignity to boyhood. One of them, however, insisted on putting her purse into his pocket, and the great singer, even against Bernard's protestations, put a goldpiece into his little hand. Presently they were at his home.

Alice, all expectancy, was at the front door. When the car drew up and he alighted, what the party saw was a hop, skip, and a jump from the car to her arms. He was so absorbed in her that he was oblivious of all else, and the party had to drive off without any further notice from him. The next day he received a scolding from Father Boone, and orders not to do without breakfast again.

He was fast becoming a celebrity. Various societies invited him to sing, and gave him great inducements to do so. But sensible Alice always told him to ask Father Boone and do as he advised. The

wise priest put a veto on all such invitations. He knew that they would lead eventually to the boy's detriment.

But in a thousand little ways, Father Boone more than made up for anything he might lose by following his directions. The choir had many friends. Any time Father Boone needed anything for his boys, he had only to hint at what he wanted, and it would be forthcoming.

He knew that Alice had a hard struggle to keep herself and Bernard. Often they lacked nourishing food and proper clothing, but they made a little go a great way. Alice could turn a shabby garment into a presentable dress. But clothes do insist at times on wearing out, and fifteen dollars a week does not go far where there is rent, fuel, food, and clothing to come out of it. But she was a wonderful manager, and Bernard was not far behind. He always looked neat, no matter what he wore. It was the artist in him.

Still at times it was easy to see that

they were pinched for necessaries. In various ways Father Boone gradually got them to receive help from him. At first it was a delicate proceeding, but Alice soon realized that Father Boone's interest in Bernard justified all that he did.

By degrees, Bernard and Father Boone became close friends. It was an unusual thing for a boy not yet ten to be so attached to a man over fifty. If Bernard saw the priest a block off, he would be at his side in no time and walk with him wherever he was going. It was not long before they became almost chums.

Father Boone took a walk in the country about once a week. Bernard was his companion. What did they talk about? Mostly they did not talk at all, that best of all companionship. Often, on pretense of being tired and hungry himself, he would drop into a wayside hotel and order a good meal. It is needless to say that Bernard did most of the damage on such occasions.

Sometimes he would ask the priest a question which startled him: "God is good, isn't He, Father?"

"Yes, certainly."

"He loves us, doesn't He, Father?"

"Of course, He died for love of us."

"Why then does He like us to suffer?"

The priest would halt and look at the little chap: "Just what do you mean, Bernard?"

"Well, the other day, Alice came home sad. I could see she had been crying. I pretended not to notice. She went to our little altar of the Blessed Virgin and prayed a long while. When she came out, she was smiling: 'I offered it up to God,' she said. Then she told me how she suffered all day from something that was done to her, but that when she offered up her suffering to God, she knew that she had given Him pleasure, and that made the suffering worth while.

"Now, why is God pleased with suffer-

ing? Alice loves me, but she would not want to see me suffer."

"Bernard, suppose Alice had made you a nice cake for your birthday dinner, and that unexpectedly a couple of friends dropped in for dinner, and there was no dessert, and that your cake had to be the dessert, and that there was not enough for all, and that although your mouth was watering for the cake, you'd say: 'I don't care for any dessert,' and Alice felt relieved, and everything went nicely, and your little 'tummy' was aching for the cake—do you suppose your action would please Alice?"

"Would it!"

"Do you think Alice would be glad because you were deprived of the cake?"

"Of course not."

"But she would be glad you did without it?"

"Certainly."

"Now, why would she be glad?"

"Because I did without for her sake.

She knew I wanted the cake, but did without so she wouldn't be embarrassed."

"It was then not the privation that pleased her, but the regard for her which it showed?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, now, it's the same with God and suffering. Suffering does not please Him, but if it is an indication, a proof, of our love for Him, He is pleased. If a man burns his hand while trying to burn down his neighbor's house for spite, that suffering could not please God. But if you burned your hand rather than commit sin or in doing an act of charity for love of God, that suffering would please Him because it was your way of saying that you loved Him."

"Oh, that's why the sufferings of the martyrs pleased him?"

"Precisely. It meant that they loved Him more than life."

"Father, I'd like to be a martyr!"

"Well, Bernard, God wants you to live

for Him just now, not to die for Him. He has His own time and way. If we live for Him, we shall be ready when we must die for Him."

After a talk like this they would go on in silence for an hour or more, except an occasional word on some passing thing or event. Ordinarily, on reaching home, Bernard would discuss with Alice his talks with Father Boone.

After this particular conversation, he approached Alice in rather a condescending manner:

"I say, Sis, can you tell why God, who loves us, is pleased when we suffer?"

"Of course, it's for our good."

"Nope."

"Why, of course that's the reason."

"Nope, you've got another guess."

"Well, I give up. What is it?"

"He is not pleased because we suffer."

"Well, who said He was?"

"You."

"Bernard!"

"Didn't you say the other day that you were happy after offering up your suffering to God? Now, if He is not pleased by it, why did it make you happy to offer it up to Him?"

"Oh, now I see what you're driving at. You naughty boy, you tried to catch me."

"I'll bet you can't explain it, though, as well as I."

"Why, anyone can explain it. I'm surprised you think it needs explanation."

"Well, let's hear yours."

"It's so evident I hardly see the use, but if you want me to, I can do it by an example."

Bernard, who thought he had a wonderful illustration in the cake, urged her to give her illustration, thinking he would cap it with his: "Go ahead, Sis."

"Well, suppose you had a toothache, and the tooth was bad and had to be pulled, and I took you to the dentist, and you yelled like fury and begged me to make him stop, would I stop him? No.

Would I wish him to go on? Yes. Because I liked to see you suffer? No. But because I saw that a little suffering would bring you lasting relief. God allows suffering and is pleased with it because of what it does for us. It helps often to give us everlasting happiness.

"Another reason is because it is the best proof of our love. Suppose that I needed something very much, and did not know where to get money for it, and that you parted with something very dear to you, say the bicycle that Father Boone gave you, and gave me the money you got for it, wouldn't that show love? I'd be pleased, not because you lost your wheel, but because it showed how very much you loved me.

"So God at times allows us to be deprived of what we love most in order to receive a pledge of our love, for when we are resigned to His holy will in our afflictions, we show that He and His service come before our own interests. In

that sense, He is said to love suffering, but in reality what He loves is the good will which is shown by it.

"Everybody would love God if love consisted only in words, but when the proof must be in deeds, in suffering, privation and the like, it is another thing. In the words of our Lord: 'Not everyone that saith to me: Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven.' "

"After that sermon, Sis, I shut up. I thought I had you cornered."

"You little rogue, you will insist on teasing."

"But just the same, Sis, I hope God will never want me to give up you. I'd rather He'd take me."

"And how about me in that case, Sir Selfish?"

XIV

THE feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was drawing near. It was on that day four years ago that Bernard lost his mother. Both he and Alice always prepared for the feast by a novena of holy Communions.

Most of the choir boys were out of town on vacation, some with their own families, others, among whom was Bernard, at a camp established by Father Boone for the choir boys. Bernard came into town in order to make the novena with Alice.

On the eve of the feast, there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, preceded by a short devotional sermon. The organist, seeing Bernard and Alice enter the church, asked him if he would not sing an Ave Maria at the service. He was very glad to comply with the request. Accord-

ingly Alice went in among the congregation, while Bernard went up into the choir. The church was filled with devout worshippers.

After the recitation of the Rosary, the preacher entered the pulpit to say a few words on the Blessed Mother. Father McKinnon was known as a priestly priest. The priest in him stood out, the man was lost in the priest, although he was a man among men. He had a way of speaking to the congregation as if addressing an individual. It was heart to heart. One rarely forgot a lesson inculcated by Father McKinnon.

In his brief discourse this evening, he sought to bring home to his hearers the truth that the purpose of religion is not to ward off sufferings, but to enable us to bear them patiently and meritoriously. He instanced the Blessed Virgin, who of all creatures was dearest to God, and who nevertheless underwent such keen affliction that she is termed the Mother of Sor-

rows. But her faith enabled her to bear her cross with fortitude, and to see the love of her heavenly Father in all His dispensations.

As she stood at the foot of the cross, her suffering was not less but greater than that of other mothers, but her sanctity enabled her to bow her head and say: "Thy will be done," just as Christ had done in the agony in the garden.

The preacher concluded by saying: "Never did woman give up what was so dear to her as Mary did when she gave up Jesus. It was because her sacrifice cost her so much that it had such great value with God. Her assumption into heaven was a fitting continuation of a life which echoed throughout the words she uttered at the Incarnation: 'Be it done unto me according to Thy word.'"

Alice was immensely impressed by the discourse. It made her realize more than ever that what God mainly wants is our submission, whether it be shown in doing

His will by observance of His commandments, or by bowing to His will in the events of life.

Directly after the sermon, the organ began the prelude to an Ave Maria, and presently, like incense rising heavenward, the words of Gabriel to the Immaculate Maiden rang out as if sung by an angel: "*Ave Maria, gratia plena*"—"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women." If the singer were in the visible presence of her whom he was addressing, his song could not have been more reverent, more earnest, or more sympathetic.

It seemed to Alice that never before had Bernard sung so angelically. The silence, as his prayerful tones filled the vast church, was so marked that each one might well fancy no one was present but oneself. The singing grew in beauty and intensity of artistic feeling until the climax came with the words: "Pray for us now, and at the hour of our death." There was

such an appeal in his voice that Alice almost gasped aloud as he sang the final word.

After the service, she could not get to him fast enough. It seemed to her that she never sufficiently esteemed him. All the way home she kept thinking what a wonderful brother God had given her. It also occurred to her: What if God should take him from her, as He had taken Jesus from Mary? The very thought of it filled her with anguish. She put it away—it came back.

"O God!" she silently prayed, "not that, not that," all the while holding him by the hand as they hastened home.

Next morning they arose early and received holy Communion together. Returning home, Alice made herself busy preparing breakfast. Bernard wanted to help, but she declined his aid. While she was taken up with her duties, she heard her brother in the next room singing again the Ave Maria of the night before.

Having finished it, almost without interval he took up "Mother Machree." He sang it more slowly and deliberately than ever before. He lingered long and caressingly on the words that were especially dear to him.

"There's a spot in me heart which no colleen may own,
There's a depth in me soul never sounded or known,
There's a place in my mem'ry,—my life, —that you fill,
No other can take it, no—one—ever—will.

"Sure I love the dear silver that shines in your hair,
And the brow that's all furrowed and wrinkled with care;
I kiss—the dear fingers so toil-worn for me,
Oh!—God bless you—and keep you,— Mother—Machree—ee!"

Alice stood entranced. She held her breath. That voice seemed from another world, it filled her with ecstasy. It also frightened her, she knew not why, but

only for a moment. Quietly she entered the room. He was kneeling at the shrine. She withdrew unnoticed. When breakfast was ready, she called him. In he came, just a boy, just himself, her Bernard.

"Why is it, Sis, that people are afraid to go to heaven?"

"What trick are you up to now, naughty boy?"

"Well, answer my question before you call me 'naughty boy.' "

"There's no answer to it; nobody's afraid to go to heaven."

"Aren't you afraid to die, Al?"

"Well, I'm not in love with dying."

"There now, it's just what I said. If you'd die now, you'd go straight to heaven, and you say you don't want to."

"O you lawyer man! You do like to trap Sister!"

"There's no trap about it, Sis, you know you're a—a—a— s—a—i—n—t! and saints go straight to heaven, and you don't want to go. You're afraid!"

"Oh, now I see your point. It's all right to go to heaven, but it's the way there that frightens us. The grave is the door, and we don't like the door."

"Why shouldn't we if it opens to heaven?"

"Do you like to have a tooth pulled?"

"Well, no."

"Why shouldn't you if it's the way to sound teeth?"

"You've got me this time, Al," at which she handed him the nicest portion of the breakfast.

"But honest, Sis," as he put away his first instalment, "I'm not afraid of the door. Just think of what's beyond it!"

"You just think of what's before you, and eat your breakfast."

"Don't worry, Sis, I'll weigh a ton before I get through."

For ten minutes it was strict business. He may not have weighed a ton when he arose from table, but he wore a smile that registered a ton of happiness. Alice

had to hurry off to work. She gave him instructions for the day, and after a good kiss, hastily took her leave. He set to work to put things in order, which he did almost as well as Alice herself could do. After that, he went out to play.

At noon he came in and ate the lunch which Alice had prepared and set aside for him. Deliberating on how he should spend the afternoon, he decided that he would ride his bicycle for an hour or so, and then call on Father Boone. He oiled his machine, polished it up a bit, and in a few minutes was wheeling over Eighty-seventh Street to Park Avenue.

Here and there he was greeted:

"Hallo, Barney!"

"How are the boys at camp, Barney?"

"Great solo last night, Barney!"

Everybody seemed to know him, everybody liked him. Up and down Park Avenue he rode his wheel, now fast, now slow, now at the curb, now in the center of the Avenue. He passed the church a

dozen times, always raising his cap. Passing it again, he saw James Grattan, one of the choir boys, coming out.

"Hey, Grattan, do you want a ride?"

"Sure."

"All right, I won't want it for twenty minutes."

He waited until Grattan was out of sight, then entered the church. He said the Rosary and some prayers of devotion, and on coming out, saw Grattan wheeling down the Avenue towards him.

"Fine wheel, Barney!"

"You said it, Grattan. If you like, you can take it for the rest of the afternoon."

"No, thanks, I've got to go on an errand, but much obliged just the same."

Bernard mounted his wheel and started down the Avenue. About three blocks below the church, an automobile was coming up the Avenue, to avoid which he turned close to the curb. Another automobile, a big truck, was coming down the

Avenue close behind him. In his anxiety to avoid the oncoming car, he paid no attention to the rear.

As soon as the upward car passed him, he steered out into the middle just as the downward truck was speeding on its way. He saw his danger. The truck could not stop, nor could he. He put on the brakes and backpedaled, but his machine kept on gliding, and the truck was on top of him. He gave one piercing cry and fell alongside the forewheel of the truck, which just grazed him apparently. By the time it was brought to a halt, he lay bleeding and unconscious on the pavement.

A crowd gathered. A physician in a passing car alighted and ran to him. He suddenly regained consciousness and smiled. The doctor, after a hasty examination, carried him in his arms to his car. He was now quite conscious.

"I'll take you to the hospital, sonny."

"No, please don't, it would frighten

Alice to death. Take me home, please."

There was such pleading in his eyes and he seemed so little hurt that the doctor acquiesced.

Meanwhile, there was great confusion on the Avenue. The report was out that Barney Kenney was killed. Someone went to the Rectory and informed Father Boone. He staggered as he got the news. Without a moment's delay, he hastened to the Kenney flat. A crowd was outside and a car standing in front. He made his way upstairs and almost burst into the room. There lay little Bernard, very pale but trying to smile. Father Boone knelt down at the bedside, took his hand in his, and for a time was speechless.

Finally turning to the physician: "Is it serious, doctor?"

The doctor, observing that Bernard was scanning his face and eagerly awaiting his reply to the priest, smiled: "Oh, just a little shaken up, that's all."

At the same time he touched Father

Boone's knee with his foot, as an indication that he had more to say.

Bernard whispered: "Send for Alice, please, Father."

"All right, Bernard, be a good boy now, close your eyes for a while and try to rest."

He lay quiet, except for the motion of his lips.

If one were close enough, one would have heard: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me now . . . , and at the hour of my death. O my God, I am most heartily sorry for all my sins. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I love Thee. Holy Mother of God, pray for me. Mother Machree, . . . Holy Mary, pray . . ." He fell off into unconsciousness.

Meanwhile in the adjoining room, the doctor began: "I'm afraid it's serious internal injuries. At first I wanted to take him to the hospital, but he pleaded so hard I brought him here. I was just going to examine him when you came in.

"Don't let me interrupt you. I'm anxious to know just how serious the case is before I send for his sister. Also, if he is in danger, I want to give him the last Sacraments."

They both approached the patient. He was very quiet. Father Boone took him by the hand.

"You're a good boy, Bernard, you've remained very quiet."

No response. Thinking he was asleep, the priest gave way to the doctor. At a glance, the latter saw the boy was unconscious. He gave him a thorough but quick examination.

"He's unconscious, Father, and I fear he is seriously injured." Straightway, Father Boone administered the last Sacraments. Bernard was still unconscious.

"Doctor, will you please phone for a trained nurse at once? I shall be responsible. And please give me your phone number, and consider you have charge of the case."

A few neighbors had meanwhile offered their assistance. Father Boone put them in charge until he should return.

"Doctor, may I ask you, please, to drive me to the Convent of Mercy on your way home?"

"Gladly, come along."

Arriving at the convent, he called for Sister Ambrose. In great agitation, he told her of the accident.

"Now, Sister, you are Alice's closest friend. I want you to go down to her place and bring her home, and break the news. You can do it better than anyone else. I'm afraid it will kill her."

By the time she was ready, a cab was at the door. He gave instructions to the driver, and with a warning to the Sister to be very tactful, sent her and her companion, Sister Elizabeth, on the errand of mercy. He returned to Bernard in all haste.

XV

ISTER Ambrose called for Alice at the telephone office. Out came the girl, full of joy to see her dear friend. They talked for a while in a private room. Finally, Sister Ambrose became silent. She held Alice's hand in hers, patted it, put her arm about her.

"Dear, I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

"Are you going to be sent away, Sister?"

"Would that be bad news?"

"Very, you know that; you come next to Bernard."

"It's about Bernard."

Alice gasped aloud, and, divining the worst, swooned. Sister Ambrose was not unprepared for this. She was a trained nurse in her early days as a Sister. She

quickly revived the girl, who looked questions at her, but she could hardly bring herself to break the news.

After an embarrassing wait: "Sister, I'm prepared now. Tell me exactly what has happened. Don't be afraid, I'll be brave."

As kindly and tactfully as possible, all the while holding her arm about her, she told of the accident. When she had finished, Alice was limp in her arms. She had fainted again.

After some time, she responded to the efforts of the Sister, and came to, sighing: "O God! O God! O God!"

She burst into tears. Sister Ambrose made no effort to stop her grief. She knew it was a paroxysm and that it was best to let it have vent. By degrees Alice calmed and got control of herself.

"Come now, Alice dear, we'll go home."

Sister Ambrose beckoned to Sister Elizabeth, who was in the adjoining room, and together they escorted Alice to the cab. For some time none of them spoke as they rode uptown. It was Alice who broke the silence.

"He's gone to Mother Machree."

"Oh, he's not gone yet, Alice dear, he may be only badly shaken up."

"He's gone to the Blessed Mother and Mother Machree, I know it; you're holding back the worst from me."

"God may call him home, but Father Boone told me he was, as yet, only critically ill."

"Sister, I never realized before what it meant to say: 'Thy will be done.'"

"To do God's will is the greatest thing in life—it *is* life."

"Sister, I thought I was resigned to God's will, but this has shown me that I'm not. O Bernard, Bernard, Bernard! What shall I do without you, Bernard?" She collapsed in the arms of the Sister.

After an interval, she again moaned: "O God, why hast Thou done it?" A short silence.

"Oh, Sister, I feel so rebellious against God! Why did He do it?"

"Dear, why did He allow His own

divine Son to be spat upon and scourged and crucified? Why did He allow Mary's Son to be tortured in her sight?"

"Sister, I never realized Mary's woe before. Now I know why she is Queen of Martyrs."

"Also Queen of Heaven. She is nearest to Him in glory because she was closest to Him in suffering. There is a mystery in suffering, but we must trust God, who loves us more than you love Bernard."

"I thought I had faith and that I loved God, but see me now!"

"Alice dear, you are now going through a little of what Christ suffered in Gethsemane. He, too, felt the rebellion of His feelings against the will of His Father. For three hours He struggled with His heart, and with such vehemence that he sweat blood. He did that in order that we might know that, in spite of our feelings, we may be true to God.

"No one ever shrank from suffering and shame as did Christ in His agony,

but He did not give in to His feelings. The will can command the feelings, and that is what He did when, in spite of the rebellion of His feelings, He exclaimed: 'Not my will, but thine be done.'

"You must do the same now, child, and you can do it by the grace which His agony purchased for us. If your feelings were not terribly hurt, you would not have such a great sacrifice to offer God. As it is, you may offer Him something dearer than life, and His peace and strength will come into your soul.

"Our holy faith is the most wonderful thing in the world. With it, we are not like them that suffer without hope, but have a strong support and a bright outlook, no matter how cruel and dark the night."

"Oh, Sister, you have greatly comforted me. I was afraid I was rebellious against God's holy will."

"Not at all, Alice, you are just human. If you did not feel this as you do, you

would not be a woman. God does not ask you not to feel, but to rise above your feelings, as Mother Mary did, whose heart was pierced with the sword of grief, but who nevertheless stood faithfully by the Cross, valiant Mother of a valiant Son."

Alice threw her arms around Sister Ambrose, and sobbed: "Oh, good Sister, I needed to have you tell me this. I knew it all, but it's so good to hear it. I'll be brave. I'll give our Lord what He asks of me. He knows best. He gave me Bernard, my wonderful Bernard, and if He takes him, His holy will be done!" But again she collapsed.

The cab was soon at the door of the Kenney home. Alice was now herself. As they alighted, Father Boone, who was on the watch for them, opened the cab door, and whispered to Sister Ambrose:

"He is dead!"

XVI

ABOUT ten days after the funeral, May Gordon was on her way down Park Avenue, returning from school. She was taking an advanced course at Maynard College. She met Claire Perkins, her chum, who was a graduate of the same college.

"I say, Claire, we had a most wonderful lecture to-day. Professor Benton surpassed himself. I have nearly the whole lecture in my notes. It's immense."

"What was it on?"

"Ethical ideals."

"What was wonderful about it?"

"Oh, it knocked on the head all those foolish notions about the hereafter, and showed that we have our happiness in our own hands."

"Oh, lovely! Tell me about it!"

"All right, come along, we'll go over my notes together."

"Fine!"

"I say, Claire, did you notice how Alice Kenney takes the death of her brother? I thought it would break her all up."

"It would if she had any feeling. But you know how it is with some people—no heart."

"Why, if that happened to me, losing such a gifted little brother and one so lovable, and by such a dreadful death, I'd—, I'd—, well, I couldn't stand it, that's all. I'm sure it would be the East River or carbolic acid for me!"

"Me too!"

XVII

THE convent door-bell rang and the portress who responded was confronted by a young lady in mourning.

"May I see Sister Ambrose, please?"

"Come right in, I'll ring for her. She told me if you came to call her immediately."

A few minutes later, Sister Ambrose entered with a motherly smile.

"My dear, dear child, how the Lord must love you! You're just splendid, Alice! You stood by your cross as a true child of Mary."

"It was hard, Sister dear, but it was also consoling. Of course I shall never get over it. I miss him at every turn, but I know he is with God and Mother Mary and Mother Machree. That gives me comfort."

"That, and also the fact that you have given God the greatest proof of love."

"I've often thought of that, Sister. Bernard was more than life to me. If I did not give him up deliberately to God, nevertheless after my first great agony, I said with all my will: 'Thy will be done!' "

"And that makes you dear to God, who is never outdone in generosity. For all eternity you will be glad that in the hour of your trial, you were loyal. Everybody would be true to God if it cost nothing. It cost you a great deal, and you paid the price."

"Yes, Sister, and a great peace fills my soul. I never thought I could feel so peaceful. The separation from Bernard at first stunned me, but now God has given me something instead which I cannot describe."

"It is His peace, which He gives to all His true followers, a peace which the world cannot give nor take away."

"It amazes me, Sister, that one could

suffer so much as I and yet feel so peaceful. Do you think I lack feeling?"

"Yes, Alice, you're a perfect beast, you have no heart, not any more than a stone."

"Stop, please, Sister, don't tease. But really I am experiencing an inward joy which I cannot account for."

"It's the joy of sacrifice, dear, the same that I experience as a nun. I have given up everything for God, yet I would not exchange my lot with the most fortunate woman in the whole world."

"Sister, I have come to give you some news. I have given Bernard to God, now I want to give myself to Him. I have talked it over with Father Boone, who says I have a vocation to the Sisterhood."

Sister Ambrose folded her in her arms, and gave her the kiss of peace.

"Yes, Father Boone concurred with me, although I had some difficulty with him when I told him the order I was going to join."

"What order, dear?"

"You'll be surprised, Sister."

"Not at all, nothing can surprise me."

"Well, it's not your order."

"Now *you* are teasing."

"Guess."

"Do tell me, dear, you really have made me curious."

"Do you remember, Sister, the missionary Bishop who preached in our church about four months ago, and who made an appeal for Sisters for the foreign missions? I'm going to Africa to a leper colony, and I'm so happy! Maybe I'll die serving the lepers. Won't that be grand? To die for Christ! Doesn't that make life worth living?"

"Alice, my dear Alice!"

"When you write, you must address me as Sister Bernardine. That's to be my name."

"And you're never coming home again?"

"I'm going home, Sister. We're just

exiles here, our home is beyond. Life is but the way. Christ came to show us the best way. I see you are surprised at my preaching to you, but it's not my sermon. I'm just saying what Father Boone said to me. It's all so true, Sister."

"So very true, Sister Bernardine."

. . . . .

A few months later, at the Grand Central, a group was saying farewell to a young woman who was taking a train for the Pacific Coast, where she was to board a steamer for Africa. The happiest person in the party was the young woman on the platform of the departing train. "Good-by, Sister Ambrose." "Good-by, Alice, and God bless you."

Some people in an adjoining group adverted to the joyousness of the farewell party. One of them ventured the remark: "I guess it's a wedding send-off!"